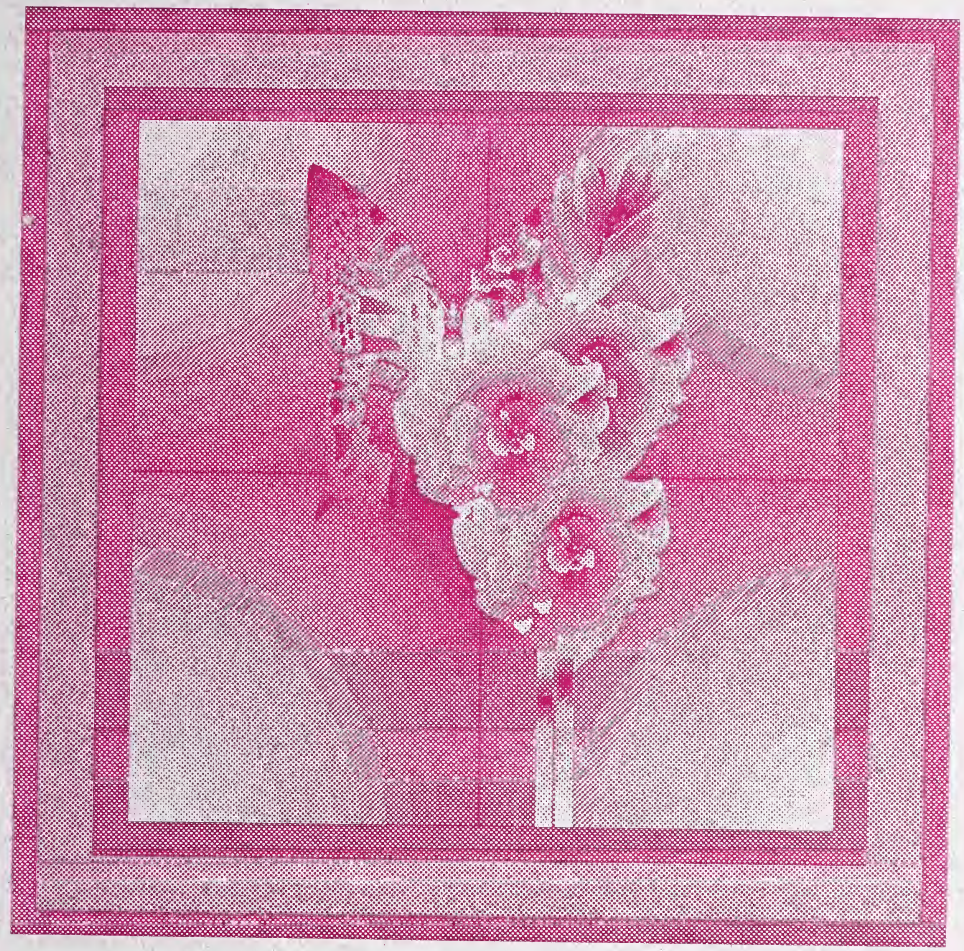
Microcosm



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Copiah-Lincoln Community College
Volume XXIII, 1996

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Microcosm . . .

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Each year the Division of Humanities of Copiah-Lincoln Community College holds a literary competition for college and area high school students. Selected college entries compete in the Mississippi Community College Creative Writing Association competition and in the Southern Literary Festival competition.

The judges for the 1996 competition include the *Microcosm* staff and members of the English faculty: Sharon Alexander, Nancy Dykes, Pam Grillis, Reba Gill, Pam Reid, Evelyn Sutton, and Dr. Durr Walker, Jr., Chairman of the Division of Humanities.

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Editor's Note,

I would like to start out by saying thanks to everyone who contributed to this year's *Microcosm*. It seems that the process of writing is slowly dying or becoming uninteresting. It is magazines like this, committed teachers who keep trying to keep writing alive, and talented people like you who help keep writing alive and interesting.

I would like to thank my hard working staff who kept working even when I wasn't there or had run out of ideas and became frustrated. It was truly an honor working with a creative and talented bunch who saw promise even when I was ready to throw up my hands and quit.

To Mr. Ross for taking care of the bids and for guiding the artists who designed the cover and created the illustrations. To both Mr. Ross and Pam Whitaker for getting the book camera ready.

To Mrs. Crews, well I guess I must give her the most thanks. She put up with my cutting class and my having to leave early and my continuous procrastination and still let me finish this issue. Her commitment to creative writing and to this magazine is amazing. She puts a lot of time and effort and it shouldn't go unrecognized.

Lastly, not to keep this dragging on, I would like to thank Lily Shannon, faculty secretary. She spends a lot of her time trying to work our duplicating in with other teachers' work. She put up with our last-minute demands and our constant badgering and kept us full of twenty copies of this poem and a revised copy of someone's poem typed in Microsoft Word rather than WordPerfect 5.1 or some other program.

I hope that this issue, the 23rd *Microcosm*, will be one that you will never want to put on a bookshelf to collect dust. Thanks to anyone I didn't mention and to all of you, the readers and the buyers.

Creatively yours,

Adam Bessonette

Adam Bessonette

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Gayle Megginson Ross

On Writing

Gayle Megginson Ross

My genetic code. A passion for words. The family business. A weapon against madness. I write as a result of all of these.

First what I do. I'm known in the publishing business as an "ancillary author." It's the non-glamorous segment of writing, and most people never encounter my work. College textbooks come with several goodies for the instructor: lecture notes, cases, test questions, transparencies, teaching outlines, and other "ancillaries" to help teachers teach. Textbook authors hate writing these. I love it.

I grew up in a family of writers, surrounded by books. Both brothers write beautifully. My father is a business and management textbook author. Bookshelves lined our home. When demons nibbled at my adolescent stability, I escaped into books. Hours in another reality without the paper cuts of the real world—words have always been beautiful to me. Biography, mystery, fantasy, news—as long as it was a good story, I'd devour it.

At first I first fought the idea of going into the family business. It was the sixties, and I was idealistically committed to music, art, escape, and activism. It wasn't until my husband Tom and I adopted a daughter that I started considering the advantages of another life direction. Writing let me work at home and earn the extra money for dance lessons, pageant dresses, and braces. Over the last sixteen years I've written a dozen supplement packages for publishers such as Richard D. Irwin, Southwestern, and Harper Collins, two practice sets, a textbook, and several study guides. I became a publishing company.

Throughout my life I've battled a demon. It's a black, cold, ugly being called depression, and it sucks the color and enjoyment out of life. Every few years my demon will pull me down, and only the love and support of my husband keeps me alive. During these black periods I can barely function. Writing is impossible. Often the only productive activity I can perform is working a hole-punch or labelling file folders. When the demon finally lets go, I have wonderful intense fits of exquisite productivity,

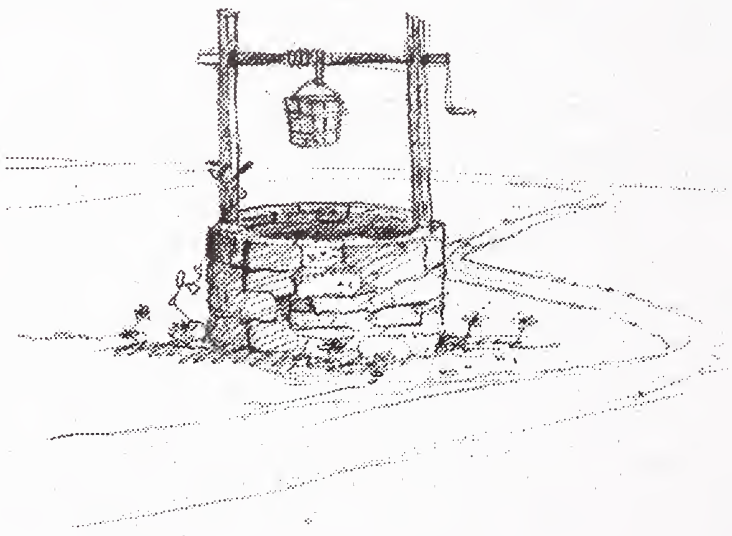
writing all night, all day. Recently my demon got a new name: manic depression, or bi-polar disease.

The publishers don't care. As long as they have their completed publishable manuscript on the due date, I could be a hermit in Wyoming or a psychotic beach bum. It's a very nondiscriminatory field.

There's a small sign on my computer: "Virginia Woolf, Eugene O'Neill, Beethoven, Leo Tolstoy, John Keats, Tennessee Williams, Vincent Van Gogh, Winston Churchill, Charles Dickens. People with mental illnesses enrich our lives." All of these brilliant people experienced one of the major mental illnesses of schizophrenia, major depression, or manic depression. Creativity and madness often go hand in hand. It is comforting.

One final comment. I haven't given up on idealism. One person *can* still make a difference in an imperfect world. I work part time at Habitat for Humanity in Jackson, using whatever communication talents I have to help fight poverty housing. Also, half of my publishing earnings are donated to causes I believe in. I do it for my soul. The Habitat slogan sums it up beautifully: "You make a living by what you earn—you make a life by what you give."

Gayle Megginson Ross



Brian Miller

The Shattered Dream

The mid-day September sun shone brightly as our moving van arrived at the old Tucker plantation. The property had sat idle for twenty years. Yes, twenty years since my grandfather, Jonathan Tucker had passed away. It was always a childhood dream of mine to live here. The countryside was so beautiful, and the old homestead brought forth an amazing sense of tranquillity. No pressure, no anxiety. Then my nightmare began.

For a week after we moved in, we stayed in the house, putting our clothes and dishes and such away. After our new house was transformed into our new home, we decided to spend several days improving the landscape.

The lawn was covered with weeds, grass, and briars, many of which were more than head-high. The fallen trees and rotten boards of the old barn were lying about and had smothered several patches of the once-luscious grass.

The house's boards, once neatly whitewashed, were chipped and loose in several places. So, my wife, wielding a paintbrush and hammer, began the arduous task of bringing the luster back to the house.

All the while, I hacked away at the vines and briars, piled them up, and began to burn them. Chop and burn. Chop and burn. My daughter, doll in arms, stood in awe, mesmerized by the glow of the flames which she had never seen in the city. Chop and burn.

This continued for two and a half days, until only one corner remained. Here a grand peach orchard once stood. I began to chop away at the brush. As I did, I suddenly found something that had slipped—or perhaps had been completely excluded—from my childhood memory: the well.

There it stood, its stone base as sturdy as the day it was built. I imagined the well as it must have been in the days of my grandfather. With its wood cover, which had long since turned to dust, it must have been a glorious sight. I cleared the brush around it and stopped for a bite to eat; cold chicken, I believe it was. After I finished the food, I immediately returned to my chores. As I chucked the last few limbs atop the fire, the evening dew fell on the brown grass.

The next morning, I slept late. When I got up, I went out and rounded up some scraps of wood, I began hammering. I was building a roof. Yes, a cover for the well. Within an hour, I had finished, and the well, in all its grandeur, was once again complete.

I spent the remainder of my day on the porch swing with my wife. Our daughter played on the floor in front of us. My eyelids became heavy, and as I drifted off to sleep, I thought of how perfect my life had turned out. When I awoke, the stars were beginning to shine. I woke my sleeping family. We had dinner, bathed, and tucked ourselves into bed.

During the night, I was startled by a droning sound outside the house. I got out of bed and started toward the window. I could see immediately that the wind had picked up and the sky was clouded over. I took a step closer, and the board under my feet creaked loudly, waking my wife. She asked, "What's the matter?" I told her about the strange noise. She agreed that she heard it, but assured me that it was the wind whistling around the old house. I convinced myself that she was right and returned to our bed. I lay awake for quite a while. I could hear outside a distinct knocking, which I attributed to a loose board on the part of the house still left unmended by my wife. I drifted off to sleep.

I woke up the next morning to the smell of frying bacon. I rose and went into the kitchen where my wife stood before the stove. There in the morning light, wearing that old apron, she reminded me of my childhood. Many summer mornings as a child, I would come through the swinging doors into the kitchen where my grandparents began each day in much the same way as this brilliant autumn morning was starting for me. I imagined my darling little girl bursting through the doors, just as I had, so many moons ago.

When breakfast was ready, and my daughter had not yet appeared, I walked down the hallway and pushed open her bedroom door. I walked slowly over to her bed, pulled back the covers, but she wasn't there. An immediate feeling of terror possessed me as I began my frantic run through the house, searching for her and calling her name. Where could she have gone?

My wife, hearing my shouts, came running down the hall. I didn't even have to say it. She could see the desperation on my face. She ran into the empty bedroom, as if to verify my fears. We ran back down the hall and into the yard. The snags left behind by the weeds tore at our feet. No matter; we ran around and around the yard, shouting the whole while. Our search continued for about ninety minutes, a virtual eternity. As our next resort, we went into the house and called the sheriff's department. A deputy was sent out to take a missing person's report. One that wouldn't be filed for yet another 48 hours. He was very sympathetic and calmed us for the moment. But after he was gone, we were left, once again, in silence to cope with our sorrowful madness.

During the night, we would make periodic rounds, hoping for some sign of what happened. We found none. Exhausted, I fell sound asleep on the couch. I was eventually awakened by a blood-curdling scream. I looked around. My wife was not there.

I jumped to my feet, ran out the front door, and spotted my wife lying motionless at the foot of the steps. I ran to her. She was gone. Her neck had been snapped. I immediately broke down. I could only figure that she had fallen from the high porch.

Just then, I heard a loud moaning somewhere in the distance. There was no wind; no, this was no wind. And, suddenly, it hit me: the well! I

went into the house, grabbed a flashlight and my pistol, and headed across the yard. Who, or whatever was causing my torment, would pay.

As I approached the old well, the moaning became more distinct. I cocked the gun, turned on the light, and peered into the well. Nothing met my eyes but darkness: cold, solemn darkness. Frustrated, I turned around face to face with the silhouette of a man. He gave me a sudden shove, and I fell down, down, down. I met with the well's cold, damp bottom with a thud. I couldn't feel my legs or my arms for that matter. My head was bleeding, and I saw a doll in the beam of the flashlight, and heard a menacing chuckle from above. Now I understood, now I knew the wrath of the voice from the well.

Lawrence County High School Scholarship Award, short story

Illustrator: Jonathan Blackwell

Short Story

Keri Sullivan

What Goes Around Slides Around

In 1830, more and more settlers were moving to the United States. When they ran out of land, they decided to take it from the Indians. In order to do this, they had to move the Indians somewhere. Therefore, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act which allowed the President to move all the Indian tribes of the east coast across the Mississippi River to Oklahoma. This event in history is more commonly known as The Trail of Tears.

My great-great-great-grandfather Deerman was a Cherokee Indian who was born into slavery. As a slave, he was required to wear ankle chains; therefore, he learned to walk by sliding his feet. His family was part of a tribe located somewhere in the Carolinas. When it was time for the east coast Indians to move, his family had to go too.

This was a trip they had feared. All of the Indians were badly mistreated. They were starved, beaten, and even on such a long journey were still required to wear chains on their feet, sliding along through rain, sleet, and snow. Their suffering didn't matter to the U.S. Calvary who rode along beside them on their fine horses, forcing them along.

One tribe was assigned to every division. Grandpa Deerman's tribe was assigned to the 23rd Calvary of the United States Army. Grandpa was just a boy, but he remembered the number 23 he saw on the saddle sashes of the horses that rode along beside him, and he remembered faces. He remembered the faces of the soldiers who rode on those horses just as well as he remembered the faces of his own family. He especially remembered the face of the soldier who shot his brother. It was as clear as the picture in his mind of his brother falling, bleeding into the snow. He remembered the face of the man who beat his mother and sisters when they couldn't walk any farther on their frostbitten feet. He remembered the face of his father begging forgiveness for stealing a piece of bread from a soldier to give to an expectant mother, just as well as he remembered the face of the men who hanged his father for the same crime. He remembered the man the soldiers called General who had ordered so many people to be killed or beaten and who laughed at my grandfather and the other small children who were trying to learn to walk with their feet chained. These were pictures my grandpa would never forget or forgive.

Grandpa Deerman was lucky. When his tribe crossed Tennessee, he escaped into Mississippi. He was about ten or eleven at the time. Being around the soldiers, he had learned enough English to communicate with white men. He worked for anyone who would take him in. Many kind families of the Mississippi Delta allowed him to work as a farmhand in

return for shelter and food. That's how he met my Grandmother Deerman. He went to work for her father and eventually married her.

It was true that he had a new life, but he never forgot what those soldiers had done to his family. He always swore that justice would come to those men.

After my grandpa and grandma had been married several years, something strange happened one day. Out of the blue, my grandpa said that he had to go away for awhile on business and didn't know when he would return. This was at a time when women didn't question their husbands, so she helped him pack, kissed him goodbye, and he disappeared.

During the time my grandfather was gone, his family didn't hear from him, but they did hear strange reports of former calvarymen being killed. Even stranger was the fact that the men were all in the same division...the 23rd Calvary of the United States Army, and they all died the same way. Late at night, their wives heard a sound, the sound of feet sliding along. The soldier would go to see what it was, but he would never come back. This pattern occurred many times, but not one ever caught the killer.

When the man the soldiers had called General realized what was happening, he became very afraid, and rightly so. He heard feet sliding across the ground in his sleep. He heard this sound in his head all day long. He remembered that familiar sound from the years he had made the Indians walk in chains. He remembered all the children he had laughed at as they stumbled around. He knew whoever was killing his men would be coming for him, and he couldn't get that sound out of his head.

It finally drove him over the edge. The General was committed to a mental institution, where because of his violent fits of fright, he was confined to ankle chains. The sound of sliding feet no long caused him fear for his safety. Instead, it served as a constant reminder of his cruel deeds. Tortured by his guilt, the oppressor became the oppressed.

Several months later, on a cold November evening, Grandma Deerman and her children sat around the fire. The children were playing with their toys as Grandma knitted. Suddenly all was quiet. They were silenced by the sound of feet sliding across the porch. What a sweet familiar sound. They all ran to greet him!

Crystal Springs Attendance Center
Second Place, short story

Short Story

Kemily Alexander

Time Isn't Forever

Leaning over the side of the bed, I gaze into the eyes of the young lady lying before me. I feel my heart slowly tear. Looking into those deep brown eyes—the same pools that showed such trust when she took her first step, knowing I would never let her fall, the same pools that glowed with warmth as she laughed through her birthday parties, the same pools that looked like muddy waters when she scraped her knee—I wonder. My baby. Where did she go?

****

Earlier That Morning

"Mom, I really need—"

"Sorry, Baby, I don't have time right now. I'm fifteen minutes late, and still I have to clean the kitchen, let the dog out, and comb Jessica's hair—where is that girl, anyway? Monica, I'm just really pressed for time. I'll be here to talk to you this afternoon."

Sighing deeply, Monica slowly walks toward the door.

"Oh, Baby, I forgot. I have a late meeting this afternoon, but as soon as I get home we'll have that discussion. I promise."

An unexplainable look falls across Monica's face, casting a shadow across its natural beauty. She grabs her jacket and, slamming the door, storms out of the house.

What is wrong with that child?

"Jessica, you'd better get your behind in here if you want your hair braided," I yell as I do a mental checklist of the day ahead.

****

"Ms. Haxley, the counselor from your daughter's high school is on line two," my secretary's stern voice firmly states.

The counselor? What could she possibly want? I know Monica has not gotten herself into any trouble.

"Hello, this is Ms. Haxley speaking. What can I do for you?"

"Ms. Haxley," the clear crisp voice came across the line. Your daughter has been in an accident. It is imperative that you get to the hospital as soon as possible.

****

"She gave us quite a scare there, but she's a fighter," the doctor states matter-of-factly. "She'll be back to herself in no time. We just want to keep her overnight for monitoring purposes. She's in the third room on the left."

Silently, I turn and walk toward the room.

"And Ms. Haxley," the doctor calls, hesitancy ringing throughout his normally confident voice. "The child is tired and scared. Take it easy on her."

Take it easy on her, my mind screams. I have to get control over myself first. The last thing I've ever wanted to do is fail my children, but something somewhere has gone very wrong. God, I am so scared. How could she do this to me?

Then the anger sets in.

I walk into the room, almost choking on the smell that makes the hospital itself. I step just inside the door, too angry to speak to her. And the funny thing is that I don't even know why I'm so angry. Maybe it's because she jeopardized her future, or maybe it's because she almost denied Jessica of an older sister, or it may even be because I'm afraid she'll tell me it's all my fault. How could I survive knowing that I'm the reason my daughter attempted to commit suicide.

"Why did you do it?'

The simple question hangs over the room like a dark cloud. Monica turns her head and her stony silence makes me angrier.

"Monica, I'm speaking to you. I asked why did you do it."

Still she says nothing.

"Look, Monica, I really don't have time for—"

"Time? Time? So what's new? You never have enough time for me. It's always I must do this for Jessica, or I must do that for work, but what about Monica. Is there nothing you can do for me? Nothing I need? I have always been the self-sufficient one. The one who always did everything—and did it right. After your and Daddy's divorce, I was the one up with Jessica as she cried herself to sleep night after night. When you started working twelve and fourteen hour days, it was I who kept the house together. I've made time for everyone and everything but myself, and you've made time for everyone and everything but me."

"Monica, I—"

"I'm not finished, Ma. You seem to have this image of a perfect daughter, but I can't seem to fit it, and I doubt if I ever will."

Taking a deep breath, Monica continues in a much softer tone. "Ma, what I'm trying to say is that I'm growing up and I need someone to talk to sometimes. I need you to realize that I appreciate everything you're trying to do for us by working so hard, but I need you now. Ma, time isn't forever."

Leaning over the side of the bed and looking into her eyes, I realize that she is right. She has grown so much. I want to tell her so many things, but all I can say is "No, Baby, time isn't forever."

Lawrence County High School
Third Place, short story

Short Story

Francis Lee

The Stare

Brenda stepped over the threshold into light and sound. Outside the grey sky was cold and uninviting, but in here she was among life. In here, she was the star.

With slender fingers, she untangled the strings of her cape. Underneath, a dress of blue lace flowed down to the floor.

The crowd surrounded her with intense curiosity. She looked upon her subjects with fondness and politely made conversation with them. Meanwhile, her best friend Marsha guided her through the mass. Overhead, a chandelier glistened.

"Go hide, Chandelier," she whispered. "This is *my* night to shine."

Only the wealthiest and most influential people had been invited. Diamonds twinkled. Gold sparkled, but this was of no concern to Brenda now. Yes, before she would have been insanely jealous of their trinkets but that was all they were to her now. She was no longer the homely housewife of a somewhat wealthy surgeon. No longer was she trying to invade a world where she had never belonged. She was one of them, if only for one night. For now, she was the bright sun of the darkness. Even Marsha, the fair hostess, was mere dirt beneath Brenda's shoes.

"Are you enjoying yourself?"

"Immensely. Really, Marsha, you shouldn't have gone to all this trouble."

"Oh, Love," Marsha smiled as she embraced her friend, "it was no trouble at all."

Brenda could feel the sarcasm. She doesn't mean it, Brenda thought.

All eyes turned to her as she sipped melted gold. Young available men winked playfully at her. Old married men waved from across the room. One attractive man seemed particularly interested in her. His eyes locked upon her. A smile trailed his lips. Then, as quickly as he had started, he looked away.

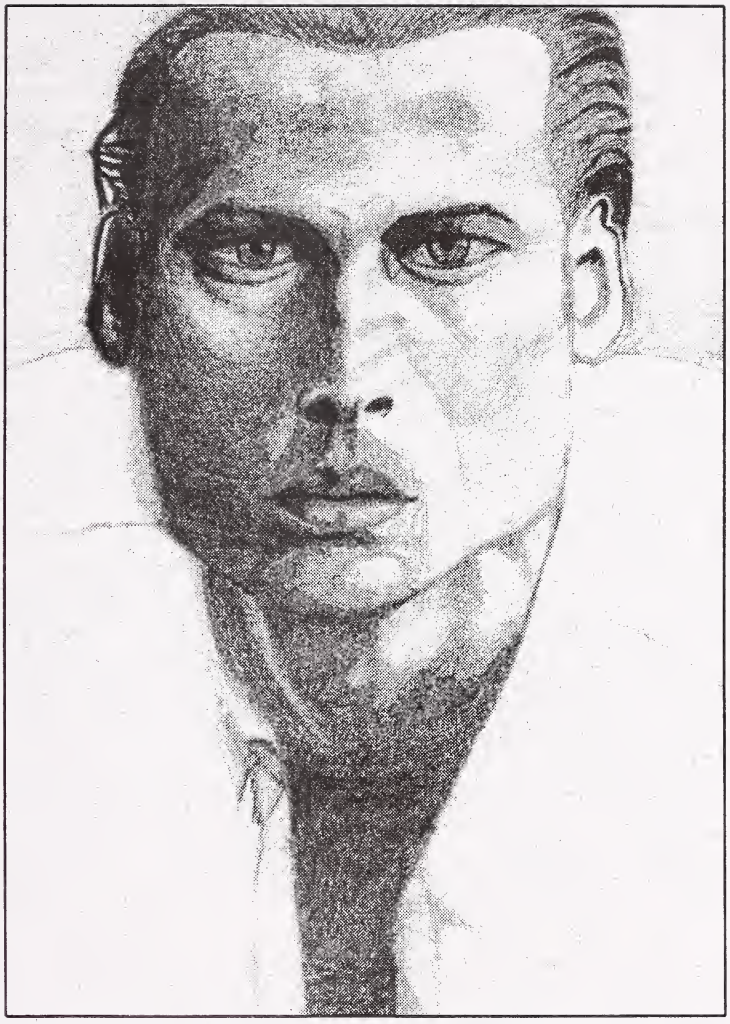
Everyone moved into the dining area. The food was ready. The table was set, and her place was at its head. To her left was Madame Duvae, the French fashion designer and world-wide gossip. To her right was Colonel Matthews, the retired Vietnam veteran made senator.

"How are you, Brenda?" asked Madame Duvae.

"Fine, thank you."

The older woman's eyes moved down to Brenda's diamond necklace as she fingered her own.

"I'd advise you take good care of those. I'm sure you've heard about all these robberies. Scandalous. I was preparing for my spring collection when I heard that Margaret...you know Margaret Windol, the millionaire widow...well, her summer home was burglarized while she was with her evening lover."



Illustrator: Jessica Anding

"Burglary?"

"Surely you've heard, Brenda?"

"Why...sure...I mean..."

"And it's one right after another," Madame continued. "Can we be safe anywhere?"

Brenda gradually lost Madame Duvae's words. For the first time, she carefully studied the strange man who had been staring at her throughout the night. He was a dark-haired gentleman in his late thirties. His chin pointed confidently. His shoulders were firm but the most disturbing thing about him was his eyes.

They were a hypnotizing grey. Not just any grey, but the grey of the moon-lit sky. A dark, unfriendly grey. His pupils drilled past her private thoughts. And she was afraid.

"Are you okay?" Madame asked.

"Yes," she said while shaking the unpleasant thoughts from her head.

She heard the clinking of discarded silverware. Slowly, singing floated into her consciousness. Merry, jubilant singing. Marsha wheeled a large white cake into the room. Brenda read the lettering atop it: "Happy Birthday, Brenda" scribbled in pink. The cake was bordered with tiny pink flowers and tangled blue vines of icing. Brenda arose, exhaled and extinguished all the flames.

After cake, there was dancing. The clock on the wall read nearly 1:00. Several men asked for a turn with the glittering princess. She refused no one. Her mind quickly emptied until only the "now" existed. Her carefully sculptured hair flew about her face. One partner after another twirled her 'round and 'round the dance floor until she was dizzy with wine and rapture. The music crescendoed, and her eyes blurred with color. Her lips were sore with laughter.

Then the music slowed. Her weary body rested against her latest dance partner. From the corner of her eye, she saw <u>him</u>. Staring. He did not smile. Before her eyes, he seemed more beast than man. The very sight of him prickled her skin. She could feel him opening those forbidden doors.

She bid a somewhat strained adieu to her partner and dashed off to find Marsha. Finally, she did.

"What's the matter?" Marsha asked. "You act as if you've seen a ghost."

"Who is that man?" Brenda panted.

"You have to be more specific, Darling. There are a lot of men over there."

"That man standing by the door," said Brenda, gesturing towards the stranger.

"Oh him? That's John."

"He's been staring at me all night."

"Maybe he likes you."

"I don't care. He's making me highly uncomfortable."

"Oh John's harmless enough. If you don't believe me go see for yourself."

"I most certainly will not."

"Then I'll introduce you," Marsha replied and pulled Brenda across the room. They approached the stranger. He watched their every step.

"John," Marsha said, stopping directly in front of him," I'd like for you to meet someone."

"I'd be delighted," he said in a low, sensuous tone.

"John, this is Brenda. Brenda, this is John."

"Hello," he said, staring into her eyes.

"Hello," she said curtly.

"Well," Marsha interrupted, "I have a million things to do, so I trust you two will be fine without me."

"Most certainly," he replied. Brenda's eyes narrowed, but she said nothing.

"What is that intoxicating fragrance you're wearing?" he asked.

"Don't be coy."

"I'm not."

"You've been eyeing me all night. I wish you'd stop."

"But, I'm not..."

"A pervert and a liar. You make a wonderful first impression," she growled and stomped away.

Anger mixed with fear is a deadly combination. Her angry words to him seemed to no avail. He stared without pause now. Her breathing hastened. She looked for an escape, a friendly face but her subjects had deserted her. In this world of panic, it was him and her alone.

Guilt and fear clouded her reasoning. She looked down in amazement at the clumps of brown hair in her hands. Dramatic as it seemed, she could bear his gaze no longer.

"Those eyes...those eyes...They drive me mad," she screamed. "Stop! Please stop! Dear God in heaven...Release me. I confess...I confess... I've lied. I've stolen. I can't help myself. Take these ill-gotten jewels but save me from those eyes!"

She pointed to the stranger.

"Him...There...Save me from those eyes!" she panted and with one final squeal, she fled into the darkness.

The party fizzled down to two people, Marsha and John. Marsha gave him a farewell hug. With one hand, he felt for his cane and with other he felt for the door.

With his back still turned to Marsha he replied, "It really was a lovely party until...I just don't understand it. Brenda? A thief? When you described her to me, she seemed so nice. I wouldn't have believed this if I hadn't heard it for myself. But why? Why would she think I was staring? I thought she knew that I was blind."

Shane Wallis

Notes Passed During 5th Period Advanced Math Class at Elsewhere High School

10-13

I got problems--tell me what's wrong with me, but don't tell anyone what I say---if you don't mind listening---Yesterday, I wasn't in a good mood. Something was wrong, but I don't know what. I saw Jack after school--and it was like I didn't care if I saw him or not. Well, we talked and he told me he talked to his ex and got things straight with her (she's been telling everyone he treated her like crap). Well, that pissed me off--them talking--I guess because I'm scared of being hurt again (you know, with Jeff and everything). Jeff would talk to Vicki and get back with her and I'm scared that's going to happen with Jack and his ex. Well--he assured me he loved me and told me not to worry and all, and everything is O.K. with him, but I still don't feel right. What do you think?

Hmmm, that's a tough one. We haven't talked in so long, I might have gotten rusty with my advice-giving, but I'll give it a shot. This sounds like one of those incidents when ya stick your hand way back into a cabinet, not knowing what's back there, and set off a mouse trap on your fingers. The next time you stick your hand into the same cabinet, you look first. You catch my meaning? You once loved Jeff; you explored new territories and emotions, but SNAP, a mouse trap. Right smack dab on your heart. So here we have a similar situation. I can understand you being scared, but ya gotta keep some things in mind. The first and foremost is if you love him. If you do, how much? I know this is gonna sound corny, but, there is a difference in loving someone and being in love. If you think you love him, but no real sure, then see how things develop with him and his ex. If things develop beyond what they should, confront him about it. But, if you really love him, confront him now. Tell him how you honestly feel. If necessary, tell him about your past experience with Jeff and how much Jeff hurt you. Tell him that you don't ever want to hurt that way again. Then, find out how he honestly feels. If you don't believe him, tell him. I've always thought that if one is in doubt of another's love, test it, and find out the truth.

Well--I told him I was scared and why--he's not (thank God) Jeff. I told him either I was scared or I didn't love him at all. But...I worried all night about if he was going to call---so if I didn't love him why would I worry? He's not going to get back with his ex--I don't think. He's not the type. I think maybe he would understand better if Jeff still loved me and wanted me back. I told him maybe we should spend time apart to see if I'm what he really wants. He said he would go along with it, but didn't need time...that he loved me.

I honestly don't know what to say. I know he's nothing like me, but I just wanna tell you some possibilities. Anyway, do you remember when I broke up with Terra? Do you remember how scared I was to break up with her, so I waited for her to break up with me? What if--? Because if I asked a girl if she wanted to spend time apart and she said she would, I would wonder. But, that's a big IF. You might wanna try to act like nothing happened and carry on like ya'll used to. However, let me ask you this, do you really and truly love him?

I don't know. I love being with him, we are great friends and I can tell him anything, (and vice-versa). Sex is GREAT!--just kidding!!! I'm scared to death to lose him. If it's not love it's something. I've been in love and it hurt like hell and this usually don't hurt. What do you think? I'm attracted to him too. That usually helps.

Maybe ya'll are just better left as friends. It seems like ya'll are better that way.

I don't know...

Well, I hope things work out for ya...the bell's fixin' to ring so have a good weekend, don't do anything stupid, and BE CAREFUL! C-ya.

10-16

What's all the fuss been about at school today?

Just everybody spreading a bunch of rumors about me and Katherine. I swear, this school sux. If people don't know the whole story, they make their own version of it and it really pisses me off. But, never mind about me, how was your weekend and how are you and Jack?

The weekend was fine...we're fine...I'm extremely fine (and have a great personality---just joking). So tell me what happened? I've already heard some of the stuff, but I want to hear your side.

Well, people said that me and Katherine Abbot did the nasty. We didn't. I swear. Me, Paul, Katherine, and Samantha went riding after the football game Friday. That's all. I didn't consider it as going riding with Kat. I considered it riding with friends. Well, I thought we were friends anyway, until Samantha decides to stab me in the back and tell her own little story. I swear, it is impossible to have female friends at this school.

Well--I heard you two did have sex when your class went to the river. What does Terra think?

All yesterday, she thought we did, but I went to see her last night and finally convinced her of the truth. Please believe me. You know me better than that. Anyway, Terra, don't trust me too much anymore because of

the Katherine thing and with what happened with me and you. If I'd have known all of this crap would have gotten started, I'd never have gone. I can't wait to hear what people are gonna say when my class has their senior parties. Maybe just being apart for a little while is best. I don't know. I feel terrible about everything, but I really don't think I did anything wrong. I just don't know what to do. It's so easy to give someone else advice, but when it comes to myself, I suck. I'm so confused.

I can see why! I'm glad I don't have to worry with of that. Well--it's none of my business really if ya'll did or didn't, but you're my friend and if you say you didn't, I believe you. I can see why Terra wouldn't trust you cause I've been there, but most of the time I knew the truth. Don't force her to trust you. She'll regain her trust in time. Stay away from situations like that and rumors won't get started. I'm not telling you what to do, but that's what I would want my man to do.

10-17

Are you coming to Vespers practice tonight?

No, I'm going to the concert in Jackson tonight.

With who? (like it's any of my business)

Amy, Sara, Cristin, J.T., and Dave.

I was supposed to go, but my dumb-ass brother forgot to get tickets.

I really don't care to go that much. Maybe with different people. I don't want to be around people smoking pot.

Hey, if they pull out a joint while your around, leave, and if they light up while riding down the road tell them to stop and if they don't tell me and I'll shove my foot...well you know where. By the way, how come Jack ain't goin'?

He's in Texas visiting his dad.

Well, have fun, don't do anything stupid, and BE CAREFUL! C-ya

10-18

What's wrong girl?

I'm just tired and I miss my mamma. She's been gone all week to Atlanta.

Is there anything I can do?

No.

Me and Terra got back together.

Really? That's really great. I'm glad ya'll worked things out.

Cheer up! I gotta joke: What do you call and elephant with a fly on its back?

I don't know, what?

An elephant with a fly on its back...duh.

You are RETARDED!!!

10-19

Hey, I got a problem today. Do you mind if I ask <u>your</u> advice this time?

No.

Well, Terra wrote me a letter and I'm not sure how I was supposed to handle it. It was kind of blunt and to the point. It ticked me off, but I'm not sure if I was mad or hurt. It was about us being broke up. Here, read it and tell me what you think.

I don't think it would tick <u>me</u> off. I'd just think she was beating a dead horse. What part makes you mad.

Just all of it. It don't seem I can do anything right. I swear, I can't talk to anyone of the opposite sex without the whole school saying that I gotta thing for her. I hate this school sometimes. And I think she's telling me all that stuff about me and her getting old was just to make me feel bad. Think about it, once you've been dating someone for two years, you kinda get used to things.

I'm sure everything does get old, but if you two love each other as much as I think ya'll do, it seems like ya'll could just have fun being around each other. It doesn't have to get old if you don't let it. Do something romantic, or spontaneous, just for the sake of being different.

There's nothing left for us to do, it seems. And if we haven't done it, she can't (she's still 15 and I'm 18, you know that). We still have to spend every weekend at her house. I'm not picking, every Saturday night I go over to her house to cookout with the family and they all wind up getting into a contest of who can talk the loudest (cause most of 'em are drunker than Cooter Brown). Me and Terra just sit and watch. And Sunday afternoon, after church, I spend all day at her house doing nothing. All because her parents won't let her do anything. Her dad's a real ass. Last Sunday, me and Terra were laying on the floor beside each other watching

TV. We were at least three feet apart from each other. We weren't even touching and her dad has the nerve to tell Terra's mom that me and Terra were all over each other. And, two, she's mad at me because I don't care what I wear to the Homecoming dance after the game this Friday.

I don't know what to tell you. She needs to try and be creative too. And about Homecoming, tell her your more worried about the game than all of this nonsense.

Are you going to the bon-fire tonight?

Yeah, are you?

Yeah.

10-20

What's wrong?

I'm not sure. For some reason, I feel kinda blah today. I've gotta lot of stuff on my mind that I deep thinking about. Nothing too serious, mainly about the game tonight and all that stuff about Terra.

I'm sorry. Anyway, remember when I told you last night after the bon-fire, about Jeff and his girlfriend? Well, anyway, Jeff told Courtny that he didn't want to be with his girlfriend anymore and that he wanted to go out with me! He called last night, but Momma was on the phone. So, I called him back, but his brother was on the other line, so we didn't talk. Can you believe this? All the times last year and last summer, I thought about him. Remember the notes we wrote and the advice you gave me about setting the heart free? I'm so confused about all of this...and what about Jack?

OK, let's think about it:

If you love someone, set them free,
If they come back, it was meant to be.
If they never return,
were they ever really yours to begin with?

It looks like he came back, but why'd he leave in the first place? You must get your priorities straight before you decide what to do about Jack. Why DID Jeff leave in the first place?

Ohhh...I don't know. He wants to go riding tonight, just to talk. But, I'm going to the dance with Jack. I told Jeff that maybe we could talk tomorrow night. Jack's going out with his friends, so I figure I could talk with Jeff.

Look, you and Jack have a pretty good thing going, are willing to throw that away?

Me and Jack are just meediocer (or however you spell it). It just seems like there's nothing there...just plain. Ya know?

Boy do I. Well, all I have to say is that I know Jeff, and know he's got serious problems...drinking problems. He goes crazy when he's drunk. I heard him tell Dee that he was going to get drunk tonight and tomorrow. Hell, you know I drink but I make sure I 'm staying somewhere for the night and not driving. I'm not giving you a sermon, Leara, I just don't really trust Jeff after all the stuff that's been happening.

You know, you worry too much. All we're going to do is ride around and talk. You know I won't let him drink while I'm with him, so don't worry. Good luck with the game tonight, I hope ya'll win. Catch a pass for me.

You got it. Have a good weekend, and, just in case I don't see ya at the dance tonight I 1l tell ya now: Don't do anything stupid, and, BE CAREFUL! C-ya.

Elsewhere student killed

ELSEWHERE--Leara Victoria Svamato, 17, died from injuries sustained in a one-vehicle accident last Saturday night on Lyfins Road. She was pronounced dead on the scene.

Services were 11:00 A.M., Monday, October 23, at Elsewhere Funeral Home Chapel with burial in Golgatha Cemetery.

Svamato was a junior at Elsewhere High School and was an active member in the Student Movement Organization, a program in which students act as designated drivers for anyone who cannot drive themselves because of alcohol consumption.

She was also president of her class and a member of the academic team.

The accident occurred just after 9:00 P.M. Saturday night. The driver the car was Jeffrey Marcus Wilton of Elsewhere who now lies in stable condition at Reekar-Nation Hospital, suffering from minor cuts and abrasions.

Police reports indicate that Wilton had been driving under the influence and now faces possible man-slaughter charges.

Leara Svamato is survived by her mother, Gina Svamato; her father, Jim Svamato; her four grandparents; and two younger brothers, Roma and Emmit Svamato.

Illustrator: Chase Westbrook

Summer Smith

Friends Forever

We are the class of 1996. There are only four more months until graduation. We have just ordered cap and gowns. We have senior pictures to take. ACT is only two weeks from now. We are waiting for prom and our senior trip is on the way. We seemed to have so much to do. We couldn't believe it. He just can't be dead. "Why now?"

It was Sunday morning, January 22, 1996. As I walked towards the front of the church, I saw a friend, and in a cheerful voice I said, "Good morning, Brett." No good morning came back. Brett asked me if I had heard about one of our friends in our senior class, Mac Lewis. I asked what. Brett sadly said, "Mac was killed in a car wreck last night around 12:00." Nancy Nations, a sophomore from our school, was with him. Nancy is also Mac's girlfriend. The paramedics lost her twice on the way to the hospital. Nancy was stable, but in critical condition. I was in shock! It couldn't be for real, but it was.

My boyfriend came and got me from my house after church. We went to see the car and then to the wreck sight. There were so many unanswered questions that everyone wanted to know. The only people who could answer them would be Mac and Nancy.

Mac was gone and our only hopes settled on Nancy. She was unconscious though. Now she responds to her mother. We have faith that she is going to make it. I know she will make it as does everyone else.

They say that there was a deer and Mac tried to dodge it, but hydroplaned into some trees. Nancy was thrown from the car. Nancy's car is still parked at K&B parking lot where she left it Saturday night. People are placing roses on her car in hopes of her recovery.

This isn't the best day of our lives. A friend comes into our lives, then that friend goes. That's how I've learned to look at it. After already attending funerals of four of my friends, I'm learning how to deal with death better each day, but each loss hurts. He was only eighteen years old.

It's Monday now. I'm making it so far. Everyone else is, too. I got up this morning and got ready for another day; another funeral. I, along with my senior class, will go and face the most horrible part of it all, to see Mac lying in a casket.

He should be "cruising" around the boulevard in his car, testing his speakers and seeing whose rims looked the best, his or his friends. It's not right that he is unable to breath, move, respond...nothing, just a body. Friends and family walk by looking down at him. Friends cry and stand by the casket. Mac's older sister cries out, "My little baby brother, I loved you so, so very much." Things will never be the same again.

Pictures are over the coffin of Mac and Nancy at the Christmas formal and at Homecoming, together. How will she feel when she awakes and

realizes that something or someone is missing? What if she remembers and asks where is Mac? What will be going through her head? How will they tell her? Nancy will find out that her boyfriend is gone.

Life is taken for granted. I'm not guaranteed a life-time warranty. I can't walk out of my house and know that I'm going to return. I saw a newspaper today from Friday. I thought, "If only I could turn back time."

As I was pulling out of the funeral home parking lot, thinking about everyone who was there at the funeral home, I looked through my rear view mirror. I spotted a black Honda Accord just like the one Mac drove before he got his green 1994 Mustang GT with the license plate that read "Macdaddy." Without thinking about what I was saying, I told my friends in the car with me, "Hey look! There's Mac!" Silence filled the vehicle. One of my friends asked me if I realized what I had just said. It felt as though someone had slapped me in my face, perhaps myself.

At the funeral at Riverwood Memorial Cemetery, the seniors were asked to gather in front of the tent at the burial. Everyone else came in after we were situated. We stood there gazing at the casket. The seniors walked by and got flowers off the coffin to keep.

From these horrible experiences, I have learned you should live each day to the fullest. You are only responsible for the days you are here. We all loved Mac and still do. I have learned a lot. Not only that life is short, but precious. You don't realize how much a person really means until they are no longer here for you to tell.

Treasured Seasons

For everything there is
an appointed season
and a time for everything
under Heaven:
A time for sharing
A time for caring
A time for loving
A time for giving
A time for remembering
A time for parting,
You made everything beautiful in its time,
For everything you do remains forever.

Paul "Mac" Lewis
October 16, 1977
January 21, 1996

Brookhaven High School
Scholarship Award, informal essay

Brett Alexander

Math Class

There is a blister on her thumb, but she can't remember where she got it. She stares at it as she picks up her pencil. She hates the math, the dull, monotonous grind, lying before her in boring black and white. She drums her fingertips on the desk. She tugs at her hair.

A lovely day, a charming day, and here I sit, bent like some poor beast of burden over the grotesque, numerical forms dashing across my paper.

The sun is shining outside, and the palms are swaying gently. The teacher asks if anyone needs help, and she is ashamed because she is not working. Behind her a girl stirs and asks a question. Outside the wind is blowing harder. A desk squeaks somewhere in the back of the room.

How much longer? It seems such a long time. The door swings open with a whine. A boy gets up, shuts it, and returns to his seat. *I wish I had a watch.* The pencil sharpener is by the window, and if she sharpens her pencil, she can watch the cars go by on the road. The sun is warm on her face through the open window. *Ford, Ford, Ford, Chevy, Ford, Greyhound...*

She sits down again. *The time seems so long. Even the air seems heavy, air like an old woman.*

The girl sitting in front of her has a fly crawling around on her back. She stares at the girl, the back, and the fly. *Flies are such repulsive creatures.* She feels like a fly. Ugly fly...She feels ugly like a fly.

The only good thing is the wind. She can't feel the wind, but she can watch it outside in the trees. She doesn't feel like a fly any more. The day is warm and tiresome. *It was an ugly fly, anyway.*

Lawrence County High School
Second Place, informal essay

Illustrator: Tony Steinhauer

Informal Essay

Jennie Turner

Priorities

I was never a particularly religious person, that is, until what I would call my "divine visitation." Last night I awoke to an ethereal light in the corner of my room. I could make out a dim outline of what appeared to be a small cherubic being. Suddenly I heard a melodious sound emerging from the illumination. I immediately knew that it was an angel. As the glowing figure moved closer toward my bed, I could see fluffy, gilded wings of pure white and a halo of sunshine which encircled her long golden curls.

She then began to speak with soothing tones, telling me that she was a heavenly angel sent to foretell of a fatal occurrence that would end my young life before the sun set on another day. She comforted me with the words, "Fear not; you will not face the end alone, for I will be waiting to take you home." As suddenly as she had come, she was gone, as with the snuffing of a candle. The room seemed darker than ever before, but even though I should have been fearful, a strange feeling of peace came over me. I immediately abandoned any other attempts at sleep and began to ponder all of the many things I should accomplish during my last day on this earth.

An hour before sunrise, I went out to an open field outside of town to enjoy my last glimpse of the morning's majesty. I sat down under a large oak tree and waited. Then, almost like magic, incandescent beams of illumination exploded out of the blackness. I marveled at its beauty and was quietly awed by the power of the Creator.

Having not been, in my opinion, a truly evil person, I did not feel that there were many fences in my past to be mended. Somehow over time, they seemed to have mended themselves. So therefore, I decided to spend my last few hours experiencing some of life's simple pleasures that had somehow become forgotten in the rat-race of everyday life.

I began by going to the park where I savored the fragrance of wild flowers, played on a merry-go-round, skipped to the music of children's laughter, and thrilled to the gentle breeze tugging at my hair.

As my final day began to wane, a gentle force seemed to nudge me toward my final destination. I set out toward the ocean where the sun, like my soul, would seem to drown in the cold arms of death, only to be reborn in the glow of a new day.

I closed my eyes in reverence as the last rays faded from the sky. Suddenly it seemed as though the sun had reversed its path and had begun to rise again, as brilliant points of radiance penetrated my meditation and playful wisps of light teased my lashes.

As I opened my eyes, I realized that what I saw was actually the morning sun smiling through my window. Even though the events of the

previous day had been only a vivid dream, my priorities would be forever altered, as my surreal visitor had intended it should be.

Lawrence County High School
Third Place, informal essay

Illustrator: Danny Shupe
MCCCWA Cover Design Winner

Jessica Roach

Karma Chameleon

I was in the car with my Momma and my sister and two brothers when I heard the song "Karma Chameleon" by Boy George. We were on our way to the Hamburger Stand to get hamburgers because it was the only place in town that had hamburgers for twenty-nine cents. They had cheeseburgers for thirty-nine cents too, but Momma said that since there were five of us, there was only enough money for two hamburgers apiece. Besides, we had to buy sodas and fries, too. I told Momma that I would have water, and that Justin, the baby, would only eat one hamburger and could I please have a cheeseburger just this once?

Momma told me that if I had a cheeseburger, then everyone would want a cheeseburger, and couldn't I just be happy with the fact that I was getting a hamburger anyway? And why did we all have to be so ungrateful all the time? Well, I didn't even know what that word meant, but since Momma's eyes looked like a dragon's, I was pretty sure ungrateful wasn't a good word.

Anyway, this song came on, and Momma said that the boy singing it wasn't really a boy, but a girl. Ricky laughed at what Momma said, but I didn't believe her. I told Momma that was most certainly a boy singing because a girl couldn't sound like that. Momma said it wasn't a girl singing, but a boy who dressed up like a girl.

I heard of this before because Momma lets us listen to Dr. Ruth on Sunday nights when we are coming back from Wendy's house, but I didn't think they let weirdos like that sing on the radio. Then Momma told me the man who looked like a girl singing on the radio was named Boy George.

Really! I couldn't understand why a boy would dress up like a girl and everything and THEN call himself a boy. I told Momma that some people must not be very normal when they are old like eighteen because when people are old like eighteen they do lots of weird stuff.

Our neighbor downstairs named Sherry is eighteen and she likes to play Dungeons and Dragons and spy games all over the place. She helped me watch my two brothers and sister one time when Momma went out with Daddy and we got to stay up all night and watch scary movies. I guess Sherry isn't very weird. But there are a lot of eighteen year olds that are, I'm sure of it.

We got to the Hamburger Stand and Momma said for Ricky to hurry and get us a big table since there were so many of us. Then she made me hold Jaimie's hand because she was crying, AGAIN. I told Jaimie to shut up or I would flush her down the toilet right here in the Hamburger Stand. Most normal people would be quiet, but not MY sister. She screamed even louder and Momma looked at me with those dragon eyes

again.

While we were eating, Justin started throwing his french fries off the high-chair tray on the floor. Momma ignored him, but I said for him to stop it. Then I told Momma it wasn't very fair to let Justin throw french fries on the floor after she yelled at me last week for FORGETTING to put my toys away and if he was gonna throw his food on the floor then we should just let him starve.

Momma said that wasn't realistic and could I PLEASE just give her one minute to herself? Well, there she went using another word I didn't know, and if someone wanted to have a minute to themself, then they shouldn't be at the Hamburger Stand with all of their children. She just didn't make sense.

I heard Jaimie laughing and then I saw Ricky blowing bubbles in his soda through his straw and Momma wasn't even doing anything about it! I decided that since Momma wanted a minute to be by herself, I would take care of everything. I told Ricky in my very meanest voice didn't he remember Daddy had spanked me just last month because I was doing that very same thing and couldn't he act mature enough to sit in a restaurant and eat a meal with his family without making a mess?

I had tried to remember exactly what Daddy had said to me and I think I said it all word for word. I looked over at Momma to tell her that her minute was up and I didn't want be in charge anymore because nobody listens to you anyway. Then Momma just started laughing at me. I was so mad I was gonna cry, but she kept laughing, and everyone else started to laugh too.

I didn't think it was very fair of them all to laugh at me when the only reason I even came to the Hamburger Stand was to get a cheeseburger and I didn't even get one, and I was the only one who cared if the kids acted like monsters and did dumb stuff and I had to be in charge while Momma took her minute to herself.

Then, the worst thing that could ever happen to a twelve-year-old girl happened. Chris Rosenblume came into the Hamburger Stand with some other boys from school and I tried to hide because I did NOT want him to see me sitting at a table with a crazy lady and three children who couldn't even eat a meal like normal people.

Chris Rosenblume was the boy I got to show around the school in third grade because he was new. That made me happy because he was very cute and I think he liked me. All the girls in Mrs. Pricendorfer's class were jealous because I was Chris Rosenblume's buddy for the month.

Anyway, when he came into the Hamburger Stand, Momma recognized him because I was in Girl Scouts with his sister and Momma knew I liked him. She waved at him and then said in a very loud voice wasn't that the boy I liked? I think that my face turned different colors, but since I couldn't see it, I'm not sure.

Chris Rosenblume smiled at me and actually walked over to the table

and asked me what I was doing. I told him I wasn't doing anything and then the worst thing in the world happened. Ricky looked at Chris and said my sister likes you. I was stuck in the Hamburger Stand sitting at a booth looking down at the table wishing my family would just disappear, but that didn't happen.

Chris said he liked me too and that he had to go because his friends were waiting. I must tell you that when Chris Rosenblume tells you that he likes you, nothing else seems as important as it was. Everybody was still laughing, but I don't think I heard them because I was too happy.

All this time I thought it would be embarrassing to show my family to anyone, and now that is what made Chris Rosenblume say he liked me. I have a lot of things to learn, like the meaning of ungrateful and realistic, and that families, no matter how much they embarrass you, are something to be proud of.

Third Place, MCCCWA 1996

Illustrator: Jonathan Blackwell

Marcus Harris

Who Really Needs Help?

Imagine this: your parents are rich, and you know they will soon give away a portion of their money to help someone in need. Now also imagine that you, your parents' own child, were in great need of finances as well. However, your parents decided to cut a check for two-hundred thousand dollars to a complete stranger. Also try to picture that your brother is a bodyguard who is willing to give his life to protect someone whom he met only two years ago. Nevertheless, that same good-hearted brother of yours refuses to even go along with you on an errand through gang territory. How would these two particular situations make you feel? Would you be happy to know that your family is a kind-hearted group of people, or would it make you mad to know your own family would help strangers before helping you? Perhaps you may think these sorts of things are unheard of in the United States, right? Wrong! It seems as if our country is always willing to lend a helping hand to other nations in need, but what is being done to provide for the drastic needs we have right here at home? First allow me the opportunity to clarify my view of the issue at hand. I am not a cold-hearted scoundrel who does not believe in helping others. I see absolutely nothing wrong with providing occasional assistance to other countries that are in desperate need of it. In my opinion, it would definitely be morally wrong to never help anyone---whether you are rich or poor-- because we must depend on one another to some extent. We all realize that we cannot prosper in this world completely alone.

Although neither other nations nor the U.S. can prosper alone, is the United States really helping foreign nations by simply giving them handouts? Instead of teaching them how to advance economically, perhaps we are only teaching them how to accept free gifts. However, the very politicians who stress "workfare instead of welfare" are the same people who agree to send billions of dollars each year to foreign nations. Are not those nations receiving welfare? Is there really a difference, or is this simply welfare in a different form? Maybe we are actually harming more than we are helping. Some nations may grow to always expect economic assistance. The truth of the matter is that some nations have fallen even further down the economic scale after receiving financial aid than they were originally ,

Besides, do we honestly believe the nations to whom we are providing aid are using the money wisely? A 1994 study revealed that many of the 1,200 vehicles provided for Egypt are used for personal business instead of governmental business. Foreign aid is similar to giving a child a huge amount of cash. Of course the child may use a part of the money for something worthwhile, but can you truly expect him or her to put all --or even the majority-- of the money to good use? Many foreign nations have very little money in the beginning. Is it at all safe to assume they will

effectively manage a lump sum of cash?

This year the U.S. set aside $13.7 billion for the foreign aid program. Although this is less than one percent of our federal budget, just imagine what this nation could do with $13.7 billion. We could spend it on crime prevention, education, jobs, and of course the national deficit; the list goes on and on.

The fact that the U.S. government gives away this much money each year would lead most people to believe everything is "fine and dandy" here in this country. Everyone goes to work each day and brings home lots of money, right? Well, we know that is far from the truth. The truth is that our annual average unemployment rate for last year was about six percent. Why does our greater concern seem to be the unemployment rates in foreign lands while many citizens here in our own country are jobless as well?

Many people argue that it is our duty to send money to foreign lands to help eliminate hunger; on the other hand, many of those same people tend to overlook the fact that there are hungry people in the United States today. A study conducted just three years ago showed that about 20% of all children under the age of eighteen in the U.S. are below the poverty line. Why are some children suffering in this country?

We often fail to realize there is no need to leave this country to find poverty and suffering; many times it is not even necessary to leave your local area to find such conditions. People in this country often try to deny that we really do have a poverty problem. I believe many of them feel this way because they do not want to face the sad fact that we have people in our own towns who are in almost as bad of a situation as the people we see on television in need of help. I sometimes wonder if the President and Congress ever think about how they would feel if their children had to go to sleep hungry each night. What would they do if they could not afford to see a doctor when they get sick? Better yet, do we Americans as a whole think about what it would be like to spend cold winter nights inside of a damp garbage dumpster instead of in a warm bed? As sad as it may sound, some Americans actually do know how it feels.

Another issue that deserves attention is military aid. Why does the United States seem to think we are the international knight in shining armor? Just a few weeks ago the President was geared and ready to send 20,000 American troops to Bosnia to keep peace in the land. Although some members of Congress felt it would be a mistake to send our troops, the President and some other governmental officials were convinced that it is our duty to do so. Is it really our duty? A survey of fifty-five students at Copiah-Lincoln Community College showed that 65.5% of those surveyed believe the United States should not send troops to foreign nations to keep peace between warring groups. Our nation must face reality; we cannot be a big brother to every other country in the world. Think of the number of soldiers who have died trying to protect citizens of other

nations. Many hearts, homes, and lives---along with high hopes and dreams---have been totally shattered because the U.S. refused to let other nations deal with their own problems. Do we truly believe other countries appreciate having someone to probe into their affairs every time they have disagreements?

While the U.S. has thousands of American troops stationed overseas in an effort to keep peace, several of our cities have become war zones right here at home. Crime seems to be a huge concern these days. Although the streets are somewhat safer than they were at one time, there is greater fear now than ever before. Americans are twice as likely to be victims of crime today than they were thirty years ago. A study conducted in 1993 showed that in the United States one violent crime is committed every sixteen seconds, there is a rape every five minutes, and someone is murdered every twenty-one minutes. These facts may depict why so much fear of crime exists today. Despite all of this, our country sees a great need to keep peace in other nations. This is almost like manicuring your neighbor's yard while the grass in your own yard stands two feet above the ground. How can we convince others to stop violence if we have a staggering crime rate ourselves?

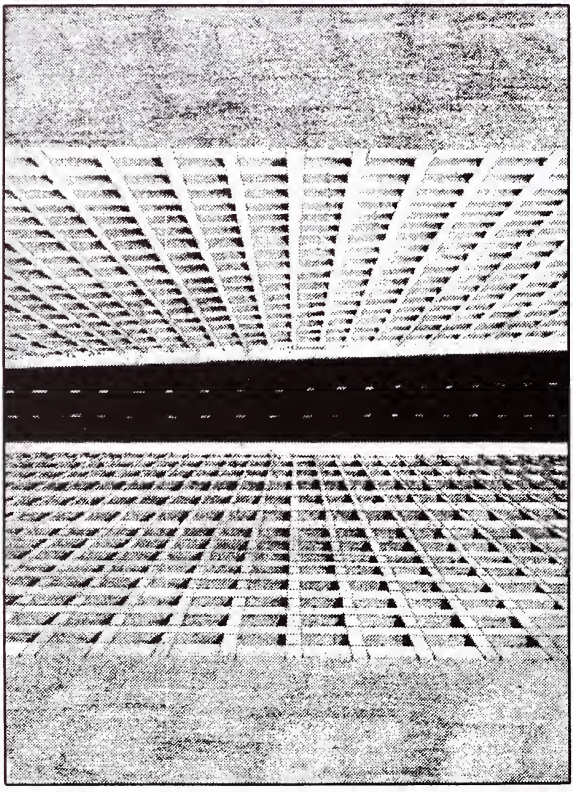
We often say that people in other nations do not truly value human life, but we seem to have the same problem here at home.Thirty years ago most victims knew their murderers; however, most murders in the United States today are committed by strangers with an undetermined motive . In the early part of this year, a man calmly walked into an abortion clinic in Brookline, Massachusetts, and asked the receptionist a question. He then pulled out a .22 caliber rifle and opened fire, killing the receptionist dead on the spot. The man then went to another abortion clinic and did the same thing about ten minutes later. How in the world can we say other nations have no regard for human life?

Is the United States doing all it should to control the nation's crime rate? About 89% of those surveyed at Copiah-Lincoln Community College feel we are not. I find it very disturbing to always see our government send troops to foreign countries while there is so much chaos here in our own nation. In 1993 about 1,100 juvenile gang killings occurred in the U.S. Why aren't we doing more to protect the citizens of our own cities from the terrors they must face each day?

I often think about those American soldiers who are sent to foreign battle grounds. They are our true heroes. While governmental officials are safe in the comforts of their fine homes and offices, those soldiers are the ones who must risk their lives each day to make sure other people can live almost worry free. I wonder if our governmental officials think about the agony and worry that is placed upon the families of American soldiers. Do they understand the tormenting days and sleepless nights family members experience while their loved ones are in battle thousands of miles away from home?

Again I must say that I do not believe our counry should close its heart to other nations. Selfishness is not the way to prosperity; it is the way to ultimate disaster. After all, we all go through times when we really need a shoulder on which to lean; however, we all must realize that learning to stand on our own is vital.

Instead of giving more foreign aid to other nations, perhaps the U.S. should fix things at home first. In the college survey, that was the number one suggested improvement for our nation. We must come to realize people will only fully accept those things they observe to be fully effective. This is why the United States must be a light for the world. If other nations see that we have limited poverty, controlled unemployment and crime, provided education, and created a booming economy, then there is no doubt those nations will do what it takes to achieve those goals as well.



Illustrator: Jessica Anding

Mandy Hall

Many Ways

How do I love books? Let me count the ways.
Between the covers on each page
I love their every sound and word
And all the tales I've ever heard.
From alien beings meaning no harm
To star-crossed lovers dying in each other's arms.
On rainy days I love to listen
To crashing waves as the ocean glistens.
Spinning sagas of dark vampires
And those of mythical Roman empires.
Even alone when no one is near
I know in my books I'll find no fear.
When no one hears what I have to say
I climb onto a dragon and fly far away.

Wesson Attendance Center
Scholarship Award, poetry

Brett Alexander

Remote Impressions on Writing Term Papers—Or MacBeth Never Had It Like This

Midnight, and one a.m., and two a.m.,
Creep in this endless night from page to page
To the last syllable of my jumbled thoughts,
And all the misspelled words earn me
Only another "F." On, on, worn pen;
Required's but a thousand words, a mere trifle
That takes but five nights' sleep and writer's cramp
And then is read with scorn; it is a vision
Choked in tangled phrases, full of misplaced modifiers,
Signifying nothing.

Lawrence County High School
Second Place, poetry

Tonya Ratcliff

Nature

Higher still and higher
From the earth you spring
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep under your wings
And singing still do soar, and soaring ever
louder.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
Over which clouds are brightening
You do float and run;
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple evening
Melts around your flight;
Like a star of heaven,
In the broad daylight
You are unseen to my eye, but yet I hear your
shrill delight.

Brookhaven High School
Third Place, poetry

Adam Bessonette

Heartbreak

Like a piercing sword, I went forward.
I tore the door down.
Everything was as red as rose petals.

The room was beautiful.
The chair was comfortable.
Flaming magenta rays glistened and shined.

I got tired of the red room.
You could say it drove me mad.
I destroyed that oh so comfortable chair.

Actually, I destroyed everything.
Even the walls tumbled and crumbled.

Lyn Reynolds

Innocent by Love

Mama, I do love you
I have always loved you,
Why do you say I don't ?
Do I offend you ?
Mama, please Mama, say no.

Mama, why do you push me away
When all I want is just a hug ?
You tell me "not now I'm busy."
When are you not busy ?
Please, Mama, please tell me.

Mama, I love you, really I do;
I didn't mean to cry...
It's just that my head hurt,
Hurt where you hit me, when I was bad.
Mama, please, Mama, forgive me.

Mama I love you, Really I do;
I didn't tell the teacher,
Didn't tell her where my bruises came from,
And ,Mama, I didn't tell that school nurse either;
Please, Mama, please don't hit me again....

Mama, I need you today.
Don't let the welfare lady take me away.
You didn't do nothing wrong, Mama,
It was my fault...
Mama, please Mama, tell her so.

Illustrator: Chris Hills

Dancing with Daddy

Small purple tennis shoes
balance on cowboy boots
dusty from hauling
soybeans to Alabama,
and gravel back home.

My left cheek
barely above his belt buckle
rests on the pillow provided by
too many truck stop hamburgers
and too much of Mama's cornbread.

Daddy sings, "Amarillo By Morning,"
knowing he must be in Baton Rogue by night.
Like a cowboy John Travolta,
Daddy lifts me up high:
So high that the ceiling captures
my long brown hair.

My little green car is cruising south.
I turn up the radio;
George Strait's voice fills the air.
My right foot presses the gas,
but my left foot is balanced
on a dusty cowboy boot.

Because Amarillo by morning,
Amarillo's on my mind.

Robin White
First Place, MCCCWA 1996

Adam Bessonette

Have a Nice Trip

The water rippled under the bridge.
Wind blew through my hair.
I turned with roses in my hands.
"For you," I said as the roses dropped downward.
Splash! Petals became boats for the
miniature passengers of pain that needed a vacation.
Floating down the stream I heard them cry out to me.
But as the memories and pain went floating away,
I turned, waved a farewell, and drove away.
Bon Voyage!

Lyn Reynolds

Grandmother

Rusted she sits
in her chair of wheels.
Moving nothing more.
Just waiting a bit
to be called to heaven's shore.

Robin Smith

Summer's Dusk

Sunlight explodes into millions of tiny glittering specks
caught by fireflies and kept safe all night.

Shadows stretch tall and fill the sky with blackness,
a canvas for the moon and stars.

Little ants do the rumba on their way underground
where they rest until tomorrow. They need the strength:
trying to move a rubber tree plant is hard.

And the tide comes in and rests itself on the warm sand,
making room on its floor for pallets.

Robin Smith

Moon Talk

Gravity is just a dream.
Neil Armstrong has big feet.
And I have a headache.
This is what the Moon said.

I'm not made of cheese.
I'm made of ice cream.
Get that spoon away from me!
This is what the Moon said.

Wake up and talk to me.
Sleep all day,
Stay up all night.
This is what the Moon said.

I once had a friend.
He was a Martian.
Now he sleeps under your bed.
This is what the Moon said.

Satellites make me dizzy.
Mars is green, not red.
Saturn has a nose ring.
This is what the Moon said.

Brian Terry

Old Man

Sitting quietly alone in the light
of the lamp, the shade a light blue,
sitting quietly alone on the shelf.
A blank board makes up the bulk of my mind,
no longer pondering the secrets of the world.
Long gone are the days when I was wild.

Years ago, they say, I was wild.
Back when my hair was dark, not so light.
I was on top of it all, King of the World.
Back when the sky wasn't so dark, still bright blue.
Sharp as a needle, quick as a snake was my mind,
back before they stuck me up on this shelf.

It's ironic, you know. I was born on a shelf
of rock above the ocean, crashing and wild.
Or that's what they tell me. I don't know; my mind
is slipping from me. I feel in those days my heart was light.
I think I was full of life. I don't remember ever being blue.
My soul was boundless, I was one with the world.

I feel I was like that, one with the world.
my memories are just out of reach, up on a shelf.
Sitting there looking at me, still, like the lamp's blue
shade. But they say I loved women, fought in bars, was wild.
I drove fast, lived fast, carried a silver Zippo to light
my cigarettes. They say I smoked too much, but didn't seem to mind.

Or maybe my mother did. Said I had too good a mind.
She said, I think, I could have been anything in the world.
I say "I think" for now my mind, not my heart, is light,
lightly hiding from me up on that high shelf.
When it works it whirls around, thoughts run wild
then fall away like my hair on my pillow. It's blue,

just like my pillows, curtains and sheets. They all match the blue
shade. Sometimes I wonder why everything is blue. In my mind
lies the answer, I'm sure. Maybe it was my favorite in my wild
days. But it's a very common color. Two thirds of the world,
I think, is blue. Everything seems to be blue but the shelf,
the one where my mind sits, still, beside the light.

The whole world is running busily around blue.
However me, like my mind up on the shelf,
are no longer wild, but sit quietly alone, under the light.

Illustrator: Sue Elliot

Robin White

The Day I Come Back

The day I come back to you,
angry pirates will dance
to red war songs
as their ship sets sail
off the Copiah County Coast.
The day I come back to you,
Father Time will stop the clock
as Mother Earth sends July snow.
The day I come back to you,
the earth will turn,
topsy-turvy,
and the Jackson volcano
will finally explode.
Go tell all your friends
and your enemies too
that Elvis really lives
on the day I come back to you.
Now I know you're not very smart,
and you can't read between the lines.
So I'll explain it very simply,
and maybe you'll understand.
The day I die will come before
the day I come back to you.

Honorable Mention, MCCWA 1996

Beverly Fries Haight

Why Do Old Ladies Wear Broaches?

Because I cannot always remember
The touch of small hands
The sound of young voices.

Because I often forget
Days filled with laughter
Nights ended with love.

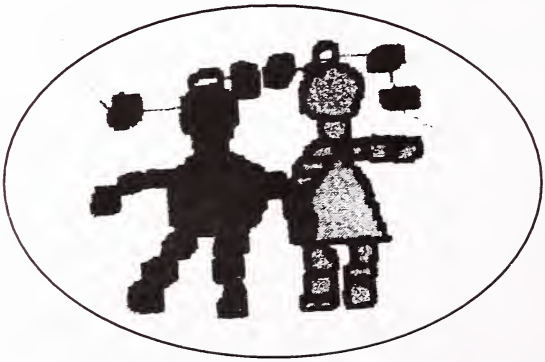
Because I cannot touch your face
In memories as light as air
Like arms around my neck.

Because my days are filled with sameness
Rainbows and sweet smells
Are faded senses of yesterday.

Because my body sometimes betrays me
Bones once strong and flexible
Heart once young and soft.

Because I can still touch and feel
And sometimes remember.

First Place, Youth Award College Division
Mississippi Poetry Society, South Branch



Illustrator: Pam Whitaker

Dedra Lott

Steinbeck's Theme of Monetary Disillusionment

"For the love of money is a root of all sorts of injurious things, and by reaching out for this love some have . . . stabbed themselves all over with many pains" (1 Timothy 6:10). No doubt, this idea influenced John Steinbeck when he produced The Pearl. He demonstrates how the treasures of peace and happiness cannot be purchased as he constructs an exhilarating plot by intertwining characterization and literary devices to confirm his conviction. Although short in length, the book holds a sense of great moral strength. This can be attributed to Steinbeck's use of theme, which was accented by symbolism, imagery, and characterization. In the following paragraphs, the writer will document how Steinbeck intelligently portrayed his main idea, peace and happiness cannot be bought, as the underlying meaning of *The Pearl*.

Steinbeck confided to a friend that the book was full of experiments, and he had no idea if they would come together to form a successful work (Steinbeck, *A Life in Letters*, 264). After all, who wants to rehash the problems of everyday life? Most people suffer from monetary disillusionment at times! Another critical review originated with Woodburn O. Ross. He judged that the theme reflected powerful and irrational attitudes, and that it held an unhappy mixture of brutality and tenderness (*Monarch Notes*).

Although the story is of a simplistic nature, the undaunting theme is ever foremost. Kino, a Mexican Indian; his wife, Juana; and his son are all affected by Kino's plight for a better life. Juana watches as her husband is pulled unknowingly into despair because of his pursuits. Kino acquires an inestimable pearl that he hopes will make his aspirations possible for him and his family. Instead, the envy and greed of the others causes Kino and his family to suffer greatly. They are eventually chased from their society (Jones 16).

Underlying planes of meaning are suggested throughout the story line (*Monarch Notes*). As mentioned before, not only are the characters affected by the theme, but the setting and entire action are influenced. The harshness of the theme begins when Kino finds the pearl; the plot thickens when the traders try to cheat him and climaxes when the family is chased from the village. Kino's illusion of the advantages of wealth gradually diminish.—The pearl is the focus of Kino's disillusionment; on the other hand, the treasure symbolizes Kino's every want. These desires include an education for Coyotito, Kino's and Juana's marriage in a church, new clothes for the family members, a finer canoe, and superior weapons. Kino feels that once these cravings are nourished, peace and

happiness will follow. As a person gains material wealth, he or she comes to believe that he or she is invincible.

Kino was not immune to the ills of human nature. Kino suffered many setbacks; he was misused by a cold and hard world, thereby testifying to the fact that wealth cannot purchase or replace the treasures of life (French 140). Kino did not lose everything as the following quote implies ". . . and they were not walking in single file, Kino ahead and Juana behind, as usual, but side by side" (Steinbeck, *The Pearl*, 43). This represents how Kino and Juana become equals through their trials. When Kino and Juana return to their village, they go directly to the shoreline and Kino thrusts the pearl into the sea from which it came. This gesture has been noted by scholars as a rejection of materialism on the part of Kino. His vision is no longer blurred by monetary disillusionment. Kino realizes that suffering leads to the acceptance of the human soul, which leads to dignity and peace (Jones 16).

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Mendenhall High School
Scholarship Award, literary essay

Kelly Lewis

The Discovery of Edna Pontellier

For the past six years of Edna Pontellier's life, she has been a conformist: she has never disobeyed the "rules" of the society described by Kate Chopin in *The Awakening*. Now it is the summer before her twenty-ninth birthday, and she decides, with a little coercion from the sea, that it is time she makes some changes. The decision Edna makes greatly affects her life as well as her future actions, enabling her to actually discover her inner-self.

In a conversation with Robert, the two became acquainted with one another. He tells her of his mercantile house in New Orleans. She tells him of her father's plantation in Mississippi and of her Kentucky heritage that somehow outweighed that of the French. While at Grand Isle, Mrs. Pontellier meets Adele Ratignolle whom she sees as the perfect mother woman, a lady who is "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm" (17). Edna admires Adele. Edna and Adele begin to sew together. Many times Edna, Robert, and Adele converse with one another, which leads to the eventual development of a kindred friendship between the three. Often they spend the evenings together discussing the days.

Upon visiting the sea, Edna's attitudes begin changing. "The voice of the sea had spoken to her soul" (25). She begins to lose her reserve; she wants to be, in a sense, her own woman. She and Adele visit the sea together and discuss Edna's secret thoughts of Robert. It is here that Edna discovers the importance of her existence. She begins to feel as if her marriage is an accident; she feels that it has no meaning.

Robert voices his thoughts of Edna to Adele and asks her to help him with Edna. Adele feels it is wrong, and she fears Edna will take him seriously. However, what she doesn't know is that Edna wants to take him seriously.

Upon one visit to the sea, Edna learns to swim, something she had wanted for so long. She begins thinking of all the things she has missed out on. That night, Robert leads her to the hammock where she waits for Mr. Pontellier. When he arrives, he tells her to come to bed. She doesn't agree to his request. For the first time, she disobeys her husband. She begins to feel "awakened" as if from a dream. After this defiance, it becomes easier for Edna to act for herself, to "blindly follow any impulses that move her" (55).

After Mrs. Pontellier's wake-up call from the sea, she begins to act for

herself. Mr. Pontellier suspects Edna is ill, and he consults a doctor. In return, the doctor tells him to give her time to herself; it's just a woman's nature. Edna becomes attached to the feelings of freedom and independence. Eventually, she moves out of the old house and into the Pigeon House. While there, she takes up painting. Robert returns from Mexico, which rekindles their lost love for one another. Edna decides to return to Grand Isle because Leonce is coming home, and she doesn't want to be with him. Upon her arrival at Grand Isle, she finds her old bathing suit and decides to go swimming; however, she does not wear the swim suit into the sea. She swims farther and farther away from shore; finally, the exhaustion overcomes her. She begins remembering Robert's letter as well as past memories; then, she lets go.

Illustrator: Pam Whitaker

Edna Pontellier is a well-respected lady. Because of her mistake of marriage, she is unable to actually discover herself. With the help of the sea, she learns how to do this and she begins to live for herself. However, because of her love for her husband and her need to conform to the Creole society, she is pressured and she feels she can't deal with the pressures anymore. Although she has discovered her inner-self and has acted upon her discover, it only leads to her downfall.

Wesson Attendance Center
Second Place, literary essay

Shelley Smith

Anne Frank's Psychological Journey

Anne Frank was forced into isolation at a young age because of her Jewish religion. Much of her life was spent in the dwellings of a "Secret Annex" created to escape the Nazi revolution, the Holocaust. As a teenager in hiding, Frank is affected in many psychological ways by this tribulation.

Because Anne Frank was a harmless school girl, the hurt and rejection she experienced seemed unjustified and cruel. Anne was deprived of a normal life because of a number of harsh laws that were created to torture Jews. Anne vividly expressed this in her diary by stating, "It is boiling hot, we are all positively melting, and in this heat I have to walk everywhere. Now I can fully appreciate how nice the tram is; but that is a forbidden" (Frank 7). Anne was forced to wear a yellow star of David on her clothing. She was forbidden to have a bicycle, and she was banned from public transportation. She could only shop in Jewish stores between 6:00 A.M. and 7:30 P.M. Anne endured much humiliation and restriction simply because she was Jewish, but, she explains, "life went on in spite of it all" (33).

Anne Frank's loneliness and positive outlook made her naturally pitiable. When Anne was compelled into hiding, not only was she torn from her ordinary world, but also she was forced to struggle for her own identity. Anne was burning to be free while trapped in a close net of family, friends, and constant scrutiny. Many times throughout hiding, Anne became nothing more than a misunderstood teenager. She reveals her frustrations in her diary by writing, "Would anyone, either Jew or non-Jew, understand this about me, that I am simply a young girl badly in need of some rollicking fun?" (53).

The Holocaust restrained Anne and caused her to alter many personality traits. Her world had become very small. Anne wrote in her diary: "I can't tell you how oppressive it is never to be able to go outdoors, also I am very afraid that we will be discovered and shot" (29).

It was very difficult for Anne to cope with the silence that was necessary to remain in the Secret Annex. She was very outgoing and talkative; therefore, Anne felt contained in the small compartment that had become her home. Many times she rebelled, and at times sadness overtook her and she cried at night. Anne and her mother regularly argued, and her sister was often short-tempered with her.

Anne received much criticism from the adults in the Secret Annex. Although she was headstrong and confident, the criticism did not leave her unaffected. Anne's lack of concern was only a pretext. In reality she wanted to improve herself, and often berated herself when she could not.

"Now the trying part about me is that I scold myself more and am much harder on myself than anyone else; then if Mummy adds her share

of advice the pile of sermons becomes so insurmountable that in my despair I become rude and start contradicting" (222).

When Anne had been in hiding for a year and a half, she began to notice that her thoughts and feelings were changing. She spent more time thinking about a variety of things, and she also viewed the people with whom she was hiding in a new light. Anne noticed she was changing physically:

> "I think what is happening to me is so wonderful, and not only what can be seen on my body, but all that is taking place inside. I never discuss myself or any of these things with anybody; that is why I have to talk to myself about them." (117)

Anne often thought about her past and about what the future held. She reflected on the happy and carefree days before she was forced into the hiding that changed her whole life. Anne had changed as well. As soon as she moved into the Annex, she became rebellious and insolent; Anne was constantly reprimanded by the adults around her. She believed that this was only one side of her, which was all that other people saw of her. She felt she had changed "inside" becoming more aware of her good and bad qualities and of what was most important to her. Anne wanted to be happy; and she did not want to think of all the misery in the world, but about all the beautiful things that remained.

Because of the Holocaust, Anne had to deal with a large amount of psychological problems, living most of her young life in hiding and away from her friends. She had to learn to cope with unbearable circumstances, sharing everything including her privacy.

The Holocaust caused Anne Frank to mature in an inhuman world. Her adolescent years were spent in humiliation because she was a Jew; and, her early teenage years were difficult because she had to cope with normal teenage despairs in hiding and in fear for her life.

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Mendenhall High School
Third Place, literary essay

Illustrator: Chase Westbrook

Corey Hux

Facing the Tiger

"Little Lamb who made Thee,
Dost thou know who made/ Thee?
.... He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb;
He is meek, and He is mild;
He became a little child,
I a child and Thou a Lamb,
We are called by His name.
Little Lamb God bless thee,
Little Lamb God bless thee." (564)

"Tyger, Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the/ night
What immortal hand or eye
could frame thy fearful symmetry?
....When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did He who made the Lamb make thee?" (565)

No poet ever captured the essence of innocence and experience quite as well as English Romantic poet William Blake. The naive innocence of the lamb, and the fierce experience of the tiger. Many people have the idea that mankind would be better off without "tigers." I don't believe this is necessarily so. Experience is the key to building character and saying good-bye to childhood innocence facing the harsh cold world as an adult. It's always been said "that which does not kill us makes us stronger." Anyone who has the bulk of life's experiences behind them can attest to the truth of this statement.

Innocence and experience is a topic which has been expounded upon by many poets throughout history. These poets tell of their own unique experiences as well as the experiences of others. In all experiences there does exist a lamb and a tiger in some form. I've chosen two poems dealing with experience that illustrate this point.

"In the Orchard," a poem by Muriel Stewart, allows us to hear first-hand a conversation between a young man and woman. It seems that the young lady has foolishly let this young man teach her one of many harsh lessons in life. She obviously thought she was in love with this young man and for this reason she sacrificed something she can never replace: her innocence. I'm quite sure she thought the young man really cared for her, but she had never been in a situation such as that before. She could not distinguish between true love and infatuation. This is easy for me to understand. People can fool you. I surely cannot tell anyone how it feels to be shot because I've never personally experienced that. But if I were to

get shot I could probably describe the feeling quite accurately. The same goes for this young lady. Now that she's lived through an experience such as this she can probably distinguish between love and infatuation. Though the experience was "harsh and embittering," she is a stronger person through it.

A poem is a perfect example of innocence and experience. The tiger cunningly watches the lamb scoping out the weakest points then moving in for the kill. Though it wasn't a true kill I'm sure this young lady is not quite the lamb she used to be after her first eye-opening experience. Like I said before,"that which does not kill us makes us stronger."

"Incident," a poem by Countee Cullen, tells of an eight-year-old-boy taking a trip through Baltimore. He sees a young man of about the same age. The narrator smiles at him, but the young man just pokes out his tongue and calls him a nigger. He says he stayed in Baltimore for eight months, and that's the only thing he can remember. This child has obviously lived a very sheltered life under the wing of his parents. His first taste of experience wasn't quite as harsh as was the young lady's experience in the latter poem, but it was harsh still the same.

I recall watching a young man's experience with something of this nature at the place I used to work. This young man had attended an academy for twelve years rather than public school. His parents did everything possible to shelter him from the reality of real world experience, but mama and daddy aren't always going to be around. After he graduated he went to work at Bowie's, and since there is no such thing as "Bowie's Academy" he had to work with African-American people. I suppose he had never had any experience with people of a different race, because he made the mistake of calling one of them a "stupid nigger." I've never in my life seen someone take a beating like that. It was a harsh experience for the young man I'm sure, but I'll bet that word doesn't fall from his lips in the wrong company anymore.

This poem is a great example of what I would call a "broken fence experience." The fence keeping the lamb confined to a field has somehow been broken, and the lamb has managed to wander into the unsheltered confines of the jungle. Though the shepherd might find the lamb and bring him home, the lamb will never be the same after his new experience.

I, myself, am one of those types of people. My parents pretty much let me come and go as I please, and I discovered a lot about reality. I know I still have a lot to learn, and I'll probably still be learning new lessons until the day I die, but I truly believe I'm a better person today for the things I've done, things I've seen, and the things I've put up with. Though life's lessons are sometimes harsh and embittering, we grow a little stronger each time we confront one of these tigers.

Works Cited

DiYanni, Robert, ed. *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and the Essay.* 3rd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994.

"'Wakefield'" from a Woman's Perspective"

Robin White

Assignment:
Imagine that you are a college student who has discovered a lost manuscript that you believe to have been written by a writer included in your textbook. Write an introduction explaining how and where you found the manuscript and why you believe it to be authentic. Enclose a typed version of that manuscript.

Journal Entry

Vacation Journal

November 29, 1995

I simply can't believe that Daddy finally agreed to go on vacation. Not only that, but we flew to Boston! Why Boston, you may ask. I did. I couldn't really get a satisfactory answer from either of my parents. Daddy wants to visit some family friends and Mama wants to see where American history and literature originated.

Tomorrow, we are going to Salem, home of the witch trials and Mama's favorite literary giant - Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne lived in Salem from 1846 until he was removed from his job as surveyor of customs.

November 30, 1995

When we arrived in Salem, Daddy grew very cantankerous. I think perhaps he was influenced by the spirits of the witches. Anyway, he refused to tour the home of Nathaniel Hawthorne with Mama and me. He decided to rest at a local restaurant.

So Mama and I set off. When we arrived at the Hawthorne home, it was closed. Mama tried the door, just to be sure. Then, out of nowhere, a man appeared. Mama says he must have walked around from behind the building, but I'm not so sure. He had jet black hair with a matching mustache that he twirled constantly. He told us that he was the curator, and that he would be happy to give us a personal tour. I thought that he was pretty creepy, and, since we were in witch territory, I wasn't going anywhere with him. But before I could stop her, Mama said, "Sure," and followed him inside! So I followed them, wishing for Daddy the whole time.

He gave us the tour of the house. Mama asked all sorts of questions, but I was too busy looking for potential weapons in case of attack. A large brass candleholder looked likely, and I was pretty sure I could hit the curator hard enough to cause injury. But when I picked it up, the whole

top of the table moved with it! "Oh, lord," I thought, "This is just my luck. I have damaged a valuable antique last used by Nathaniel Hawthorne himself! What am I going to do?"

I looked down into the table and noticed a bunch of yellowed paper. Keeping a cautious eye on Mama and the curator, I reached into the table and pulled it out. Glancing at it quickly, I decided it must be some sort of manuscript. Maybe I had discovered some lost work by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Could this be an original copy of a famous story?

Mama was busy telling the curator about the wonderful writers from Mississippi, and neither of them noticed as I casually walked over to the window. Holding the manuscript in the light, I read the faded handwriting. "Mrs. Wakefield," it said. I scanned the paper quickly. I was right! I had discovered a manuscript by Nathaniel Hawthorne! It was like his short story, "Wakefield," except it was told from Mrs. Wakefield's point of view.

I called Mama and the curator over. Placing a pair of old-fashioned spectacles on his nose, Mr. Raiford began reading the papers. After a few nerve-wracking moments, he announced, "Young lady, you have discovered a manuscript that I have been searching for since April! In April, I read in one of Hawthorne's diaries that he had first written "Wakefield" from Mrs. Wakefield's point-of-view. We must contact the press. My dear girl, you have made a literary discovery. On behalf of the people of Massachussetts, I thank you."

Mrs. Wakefield

Nathaniel Hawthorne

I am Mrs. Henry Wakefield. I live alone in a rather sleepy part of London. I should be surrounded by my children, with my husband by my side, but my husband has been gone for twenty years now. Is he dead, you ask. That, my friend, is the mystery.

One day Henry announced that he was going to take the night coach into the county. I wondered where he was going, but Henry is very fond of mystery. I thought it was harmless, so I didn't press for answers. He did tell me that he planned to return in three or four days, and that he should be back by Friday evening at the latest. Friday came, and Friday went.

Of course, I was worried about my husband. I reported his disappearance to the police. They could do nothing. I was so horribly frightened. All of our neighbors and friends gossiped about Henry's disappearance. The majority was of the opinion that I was now a widow. A few mean-spirited neighbors thought that Henry ran away with Mrs. Alexander's maid. Mrs. Alexander, our next door neighbor, explained that the poor girl had returned to the country to be married, but to no avail.

Then, three weeks after Henry's disappearance, I had the most horrible dream! I dreamt that Henry was still alive, and that he had simply chosen not to make his life with me. I almost believe that I had rather be a widow. But sometimes I wonder if Henry is still alive.

That dream became all I could think about. As I went about my daily tasks, I could imagine Henry, alive, somewhere else. As I took tea, I could imagine Henry taking his tea. Each day became torture. Finally, I grew so worried about Henry that I became ill. My maid sent for the apothecary, and he was no help at all. The apothecary ordered the door knocker muffled, and he sent for the physician. I confessed to him the nature of my illness, and he laughed.

"My dear woman," he said in a booming voice, "that dream was not a vision of your husband. That dream was simply a bit of undigested pie or cake. Last night I dreamt that the measles could be prevented. Now you know that will never happen!"

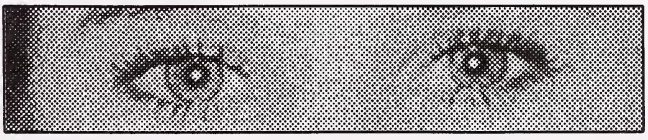
I grew so angry with the doctor that I decided to get well. I know that was foolish, but it really seemed to help. I try to stay busy so I won't think about Henry. I have refused several gentlemen callers because I am still not convinced that Henry is dead. I do not believe that I am a widow.

One morning I as I was walking to church, prayerbook in hand, I saw a man staring at me. I thought perhaps I reminded him of someone, and then the crowd pressed us together. He looked like my Henry! I walked on towards the church, shaken. I stopped in the church doorway, and glanced back down the street. Oh, but if that only were Henry! I didn't see the gentleman again. I opened my prayerbook and entered the church, trying to calm my nerves.

I am growing older now. I am no longer the young woman that Henry left. Today I celebrated, if one could call it a celebration, my fiftieth birthday. I have grown portly and gray. I wonder if Henry would be glad that he left if he could see me now?

I hear Jane answering the door. I have a caller. Jane says that he is an elderly gentleman. I smile at the caller, seated in the front parlor. I look at him and. . .

"Oh my heart, it is Henry!"



Illustrator: Jonathan Blackwell

Lyn Reynolds
Scott Reynolds
Cecile Chapman

A-MAIL

CAST: Don (Mechanic/Lover)
Kathy Smith (Wife/Lover)
Prison Guard

This is intended for stage production, with a man and woman on stage, each sitting at a computer terminal. When one is typing the E-Mail message to the other, one will be reading it aloud, with the spotlight brought up on the reader.

Don
Dec. 28
Mrs. Smith,

Your car will be ready some time late this afternoon. Mr. Smith suggested that I contact you about picking it up as he had scheduled a late meeting. I look forward to meeting you.
Donald R. Crews

Kathy
Jan. 2
Don,

The play was wonderful. Thanks for sending the tickets. Ralph does not know it was you who sent us the tickets. It's better to leave him in the dark. Hope to see you next week.
ks

Don
Jan. 4
Kathy,

I cannot wait until next week. Can you meet me at our soon-to-be usual place, the pier down by Fisherman's Wharf, on the 6th? Ralph came in today. He stood around just talking for awhile, making me as jumpy as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs. I tried not to act nervous. Let me know if he mentions it, okay, baby? After we settled the bill on your car, Ralph asked if I had seen you lately. If it was not for the joy that I feel when seeing you, I would call it quits because Ralph has a way of making you feel like a gutless imbecile. I hate the way he looks down his nose when he speaks to me. He treats me like a child. Please come to the pier on the 6th, okay?
dc

Kathy
Jan.5
Don,

I can't make it tomorrow. Ralph is constantly watching me like a hawk. Can you make it the 9th instead? Ralph will be out of town that day. Ralph said he saw you yesterday. I hope he didn't cause a scene. Ralph can be so mean sometimes. He did not say anymore about you or the shop. It seemed as if he was waiting for me to ask him something about you or it. I was afraid to say very much so I told him, "That is nice, dear." It is hard to understand him at times. If only he could be like you.
ks

Don
Jan.8
Kath, honey,

I have a new unbreakable code for your computer so Ralph won't accidentally access your E-MAIL file. I shudder to think what that animal could do to you in one of his so-called rages. Meet me at the corner market around 5 p.m. today. I will not speak to you when we pass in the aisle. Instead I will hand you a small card with the information you need to set up for your new file and e-mail account.
Donny

Kathy
Jan. 8
7 p.m.
Don, honey,

Thanks for the new code. I have already installed it.
ks

Don
Jan. 9
10 p.m.
Kat,

It was so good seeing you this afternoon. I love the way you laugh when you are having a good time. I also love the way our interest coincide in literature as well as classical music. It just goes to show you how much we have in common. Right baby? This is one of the many, many reasons why we are so good together. I anxiously await our next rendezvous. Will tomorrow be too soon for you, babe? Let me know ASAP. Do you think your cook will be suspicious of your frequent absences during the luncheons she prepares just for you? We must be careful, for your sake baby. I hope to see you tomorrow, and I can hardly wait.
lover boy,(Donny)

Ha--Ha-- Ha

Kathy
Jan. 9
11 p.m.
Lover Boy,

Just kidding about that. I do love you even though we have not made love yet. Maybe I can correct that soon. I hope to anyway. I will be able to meet you after 9 a.m. . Let me know where and when. Tomorrow we can have the entire day to ourselves as Ralph will be away on a business trip. He told me he would be flying to Jackson, Mississippi, then driving up to Madison so he could close a deal with the software giant I.E. Crews. Any relation? I wait with bated breath for your reply tomorrow.
ks

Don
Jan. 10
11:15 p.m.
Ka-Ka baby,

I will pick you up at the corner market around 9:30 in the morning. I am sure your car will be safe in the private lot across the street from the market. You are in for a surprise tomorrow. Wear shorts and bring your swimming suit. See you soon.
don

Kathy
Jan. 11
Sailor Boy,

Today was so--what's the word--PERFECT. The things you do for me. Well you know what I mean. I just love being with you. Are you sure we won't get caught using your boss's yacht? I hope you meant it when you said, "This will be our special place for all the times when we are able to meet." I'm sorry to be such a worrier. With Ralph being the way he is, I'm sure you can understand my reason for asking. By the way, I love the way you handle the yacht. See you soon.
ks

Don
Jan. 12
My dearest,

Yes, I agree our time together was PERFECT. I am also looking forward to the next stolen moment we shall have. You and me together for a whole day! That, Kathy, was wonderful. You can see why I sound like a lovesick school boy when we are apart. Life is meaningless without you to share it

with, babe. Do not worry your pretty little head about Molly being suspicious of us. She has never once questioned my actions or whereabouts. She is a very quiet and mousy lady with little outside interest. Not once in the time that we have been together has she asked me where I have been. For that I am grateful to say the least. She prefers to stay home than accompany me to dinner or the theater. I guess when we first met I was ready for some companionship with another who shared my interest in the arts. Sorry to rattle on again, love. I am glad your husband despises the theater the same way my Molly does. That makes it the one place we can go that no one person will question the other's escort. Nobody will even know. Can you believe that? I did get the tickets you so badly wanted. You, sweetheart, are going to see the revival of **SORRY, WRONG NUMBER.** The tickets are for the 20th, I do hope that will be okay.

dc, The Sailorman

Kathy
Jan.14
Donny, My *Sailorman,*

I saw a woman at the "Club" last night who matched the description you gave me of your "dumpy grumpy" Molly. I am sure that was she. She was such a bore, too. How did you ever get a "catch" like her? Never mind don't answer that. I already know the answer--Money. The very same reason I got a "catch" like Ralph. Hope to see you on the 20th.

ks

Kathy
Jan.16
Don,

Last night Ralph took my car, along with my credit cards and checkbook away from me. Can you believe how mean he is now? He said if I needed anything he would get it for me. He has even put me on a small allowance--just like a child. Yet he gives Cook money for groceries each month. If I can bribe Cook with a little cash, maybe she and I can come to an agreement so we could both benefit. My idea is this; people are always throwing their grocery receipts down outside of the market so I will pick them up, give them to Cook, she will show Ralph how inadequate the amount allotted for groceries is, Ralph then increases the allotment, Cook and I then split the additional money. Aren't you proud of me? This will give me the extra money I need for a cab when I come to see you. Pretty smart, don't you agree?

Oh, Don, I need you so much, so badly.

ks

Don
Jan. 19
Honey,

I am so very sorry about your treatment at home. It feels as if it has been an eternity since we were last together, and I can hardly wait until tomorrow night. Ralph came by the shop today asking why your car had to be brought in every few days for work. I finally told him about the recall on the parts we installed last month. I explained how the factory was so slow in sending the replacement parts and how we would replace whatever they sent each week. He understood that but was not too happy about it. I don't think he suspected anything. I sure hope he didn't. I do not want you to be hurt by him. With his bad temper, that you described so well, I would hate for him to cut or bruise that beautiful face of yours.

don

Don
Jan. 21
My dearest,

What happened to you last night? I missed you so very much at the play. I know how much you wanted to see that play and my heart goes out to you in your disappointment. I could not enjoy it, myself, for that reason. My mood was down all during the play because of your empty seat next to me. I hope we can see each other soon. Don't forget that I am and remain your loving servant.
Don

Kathy
Feb,1
Don,

If Ralph were not so rich, I would divorce him. Why did I sign that agreement before we married? Now, if I leave him, all that I get is the clothes on my back. Can you believe how mean Ralph is? One good thing though--if Ralph ever dies, I am left with 75% of his estate with his son getting the other 25%. That kid should not get one red cent. In fact, I have never even met him. He did not even come to our wedding two years ago because of that damned job of his. He works for the government somewhere in Washington, DC. Never mind about him. I left out the best part, I would also get you. Bye for now, love.

ks

Don
Feb. 17
Kathy,

I haven't heard from you lately---is something wrong? I miss you with that sweet smile of yours on your beautiful face and your soft laughter that brightens up my days like sunshine after a spring rain. Are you worried about someone getting my access code to my E-MAIL? I keep my computer in my office at the shop and no one goes in there but me. No one can access my code...not even the CIA...except for you, sweetheart, since we both share the same code, the same except for one ditgit. Now I guess you know my greatest secret, my code.
dc

Kathy
Feb.18
Don,

I guess I do still worry about someone having access to your E-MAIL. I know--I know. Stop worrying about that. Okay I will try. You said not even the CIA could access your computer code. WOW. I think I love you, babe. Bye for now.
ks

Don
Feb. 26
Sweetheart,

Why did you call me on the phone at the shop? Haven't I explained to you how dangerous that could be because Ralph could possibly be tapping your phone line as well as mine? I am so glad you didn't say anymore than you did about us going to the new musical that opens in town tomorrow night.

Baby, I am sorry, But I can't go with you. My Molly is sick with the flu or something like the flu--feverish with body aches--and needs me home to take care of her. I feel I must stay home even though I would rather be with you. My thoughts will be with you all night long. So enjoy the musical for both of us.
Donald

Kathy
Feb.28
Don,

I am sorry you could not make it the other night. Was Molly really that sick or was she just pretending so you would have to stay home with her? I'm sorry. I did not mean to make it sound like I'm putting pressure on you. I really missed you. She has you to herself five nights a week. All I

have are stolen moments of your time. If I could get more money somehow, would you be able to leave her for me? Don't answer that. If she has as much as she says she does, why is she still making you work down at that grimy old shop? Only two more days before we will be together again. I can hardly wait.
ks

Don
March 1
Honey,

I feel sick that I missed seeing you this week. Yes, Molly was really sick with an elevated temperature. I took it myself to make sure. She seems better today, but I must admit while she was so sick last night, I began to fantasize about our being together if she should happen to die. We must put Ralph's and Molly's early demise out of our heads. It is not right to think of that. I hope to see you soon, baby. Right now Molly won't let me out of her sight. As soon as she feels better, she will all but throw me out. Darling, please try to be patient. It won't be much longer.
don

Kathy
March 15
10 a.m.
Don,

I must see you today!
ks

Don
March 15
Noon
Sweetheart,

I simply cannot get away from the shop today. We are swamped with repairs, and Ralph is in the outer office, too. I can't just up and walk out with him here. If I leave, he might get suspicious.
don

Kathy
March 15
2 p.m.
Don,

I really wanted to talk to you in person about this. I am sorry Ralph is such an ass to show up the one afternoon I need you to take off, but I do understand. Okay, I will tell you the news. Ralph gave me his tax return to mail for him this morning. He has never trusted me to do this before, but this morning he was running late for an appointment so he did not have a choice. Well... need I say more? I opened it. Ralph has over **EIGHT**

MILLION in assets. I was taken aback by this. I never would have guessed. Anyway, when Ralph dies I will be filthy rich. As soon as the money is in my name free and clear, we can be married. During the time I'm waiting for the titles to change, you can file for divorce from Molly. I am so excited! We are going to have so much fun. I need your help on a matter of grave importance. Ralph is bringing his MG by your shop tomorrow for the brakes to be replaced. Do you know what I mean?

ks

Don
March 15
8 p.m.
My dear,

I'm not sure exactly what you mean. Can you be a little more explicit? When Ralph left yesterday, he seemed rather strange. He isn't suspicious is he? I hope not. Okay, tell me what you have in mind for me to do to Ralph's MG.
don

Kathy
March 16
7 a.m.
Don,

Okay, I will be crystal clear on what needs to be done. Remove the brakes from Ralph's MG somehow. You know I don't understand cars at all. You will know what I'm talking about. Ralph will be going up to the lake cabin after he picks up his car tonight.
That road is named Roller Coaster Hills for a reason you know. Well on that road is a curve in the middle of a long downgrade. That curve is interesting to say the least. People have called it Dead Man's Curve for years because of all the people who have died there. Without his brakes Ralph can't make it around the curve. He will fly right off the side of the mountain. The valley is over 3000 feet below so whatever you do to the car it won't be found after impact.
ks

Kathy
March 16
8:30 a.m.
Don,

Ralph is on his way to the shop. See you tonight. I am so excited that I can hardly stand it.
ks

Lights out

***

This scene will take place behind a large piece of white paper covering the entrance of a large hallway. Painted on the opposite side of the paper will be black bars with a bright light to silhouette the actress. The actress will be sitting on a cot reading the letter that a prison guard hands her.

Ralph (Don)

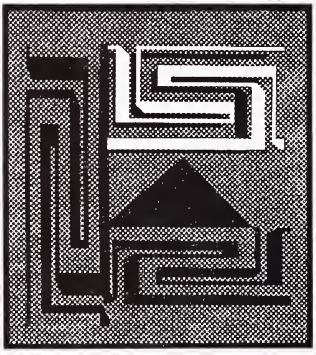
April 23
8 a.m.
Kathy,

I knew you would not read this for another sixty years if I waited on E-Mail, but I felt you should know the truth now your trial is over. My name is not really Don. It is Ralph, Jr. I do work for the government, as an agent with the Secret Service, not in a garage like you believed. Dad called me awhile back with a little problem he had. So I decided to take some vacation time to help him. When my boss learned of my quest to help Dad, they also discovered a chance to nab a possible suspect wanted in two murders of her previous husbands. I got paid for the work that I did and my vacation days were reinstated since I did such a good job. As you guessed, that suspect was you, my dear. By the way I am not married but live with Molly. She is the most lovable as well as forgiving collie in the world. You could have learned a lot from her. Dad was quite upset when he learned of your plan to murder him but fared the experience with a new sense of calm. I hope prison treats you well. If I had been you I would have opted for the death sentence instead of pleading guilty the way you did. You, my dear step-mother, are not cut out for prison life. Well, what ever happens to you in there, it will be no less than you earned through your actions. Thank God that I never became one of your lovers. You are a real piece of work, and I hope I never have the opportunity to run into another such as you.
Ralph, Jr.

Curtains close

THE END

Honorable mention
Southern Literary Festival *1996*
MCCCWA *1996*



Illustrator: Pam Whitaker

Robin White

Something Fishy

Cast: **J.T. Walker - owns a wrecker service**
Ruby Walker - J.T.'s wife
Becky Ramsey - J.T. and Ruby's 20 yr. old granddaughter
Jimmy Ramsey - Becky's daddy; occasionally helps J.T.
Amanda Martin - FBI agent
Billy Lofton - deputy sheriff
George Barron - J.T. and Jimmy's buddy

PLACE: The stage should be divided in half, with the left side being Ruby Walker's kitchen. The right side of the stage should represent the car lot. The kitchen should contain a table and chairs, placed down center. There should be a refrigerator and stove placed on the left of the stage. Ruby is busy cooking while J. T. is seated at the table with a stack of papers and a cordless phone in front of him. There should be a screen door separating the two parts and another door at stage left. There is a small table with a CB radio down right center.

I

J.T.

What in this world is taking Becky so long to get here? You'd think she lived in Timbuktu instead of a mile down the road.

Ruby

(faces J.T., shakes wooden spoon at him)

She probably succumbed to that horrible smell. You need to turn off that TV and find out what's wrong. When Becky gets here, she'll probably turn around and leave. Then you'll have to fill out all that paperwork by yourself, won't you? You should be grateful she's helping you at all. Bless her heart, she stayed here and helped you until 1:00 this morning, and now you're complaining about her.

(*J.T. is about to reply when Becky enters from the car lot.*)

Becky

Don't you complain about me, PawPaw! If you've just got to

complain about something, though, tell me what that smell is! Did the whole neighborhood die last night or what?

J.T.

Well, you wouldn't have known about it unless they'd been in your dreams! I swear, you sleep the most of any one young'un I've ever seen! What took you so long to get here? Do you realize that you are three hours late for work? Between that ice cream truck wreck yesterday afternoon and that roadblock last night, we're way behind on paperwork. Walker's Wrecker Service doesn't run itself, you know.

Becky

You'd better believe I know. You haven't done any of the paperwork since I finished the first grade! I'm three hours late for work because I got off eight hours late last night! I followed you around until 1:00 this morning. I wrote down every serial number, every tag number, and any other piece of identification I could find on thirty-five cars! Not only that, but I passed up the party of the year to help you! You know that Dan always has a party on the Fourth of July, and I missed it for you! So you hush up and leave me alone. (*turns and looks at Ruby)* MawMaw, did you ever get all that ice cream put up? That ice cream company's loss sure was our gain. If ice cream wouldn't melt they sure wouldn't have given it to us. How much did we get in all? *(sits down at table on J.T's right and begins shuffling papers)*

Ruby

We filled up both of our freezers, your mama's freezer, your uncle Steve's freezer, and the Albrittons' freezer at home and the one at their warehouse. *(Opens freezer door to show off its contents*) All in all, that's six freezers full of ice cream. That's not including candy and bubble gum, either. J.T., maybe that smell has something to do with that ice cream truck.

J.T.

There's nothing in that truck to smell, Mama. You and the girls cleaned it out good. Besides, Becky's daddy pulled that in, and if it had smelled, he would still be here complaining. I don't smell a thing, anyway. My old sinuses are messed up, you know. Maybe I

should go to the doctor. Then Becky could go home, go back to bed, and get up on the right side.

(Becky sticks her tongue out at J.T., who laughs at her.)

Ruby

J.T., you've been saying your sinuses are messed up since 1956. You passed the doctor's help a long time ago. Besides, if you can't smell that, you're dead and don't know it. Now, get out of that chair, go outside, and find out what that smell is. *(Stomps her foot and points to the door at right.)*

J.T.

First, we've got to make out tickets. Becky's only got another month to work before she transfers from that community college to USM, and I'd like to get my money out of some folks. Besides, we need to give her money to help with her expenses, and we need to make money before we can give to anybody, even our favorite grandchild. Becky, I left the ticket book in yonder on the desk. Go get it.

(Becky exits stage left and Ruby sprays Lysol towards her husband and all around the room. Becky enters with ticket book, sits at table.)

Becky

Whenever you're ready, PawPaw. When we finish, remind me to call and order some new ticket books. We're almost out.

J.T.

(Pulls a small notebook out of his shirt pocket.)

All right. Here's the first one. It happened three days ago. *(Looks at his watch)* Let's see, that would have been July 2. Mississippi Highway Patrol called me to Terry. I took my little Ford wrecker. A man from out of Louisiana was pulling his wife's car, and he wrecked. I got the car. That other wrecker company got the truck. It looks like they would have wanted the same folks to have both vehicles, don't it? Anyway, I don't have their names because it killed the woman, and they took the man to the hospital. I didn't

even get the car keys.

Becky

Well, if they took him to Henry Taylor Memorial, it won't be long until he joins his wife. They call that place Henry Homicide for a reason.

Ruby

Yeah, it's the same reason it's called a memorial hospital. It's in memory of the patients. Do you think it's really haunted? That's what old Cecil says.

J.T.

Now, Mama, you know that Cecil thinks everything is a ghost. The first thing he told me when I hired him was that he wouldn't truck with no ghost. Did you see him last night, Becky? He thought that little white sports car in the back of the lot was a ghost! About that hospital, though, I wouldn't take my dog there. (*looks towards the door at stage right)* Would I, Molly-gal?

(a dog barks, offstage)

J.T.

Mama, why don't we let her in? It sure is hot out there! Poor old Molly! She sits outside all day long in the heat, with all that hair. You know, Mama, she tries to protect us. What would you do without her if somebody tried to break in?

Ruby

J.T., Molly would probably show the thief where the spare key is hidden, then escort him through the front door. That nasty dog is not coming in my clean house! Besides, I don't know how you'd know if it was hot. You haven't been out of that chair all day! You have got to do something about that smell. I can't take it. I tell you, I just can't take it.

(Sprays more Lysol)

Becky

Maybe Molly killed a possum or something, PawPaw. If she dragged it under the house, the smell could come in through the air condi-

tioner vents.

J.T.

I'll bet that's it. You hear that, Mama? Becky's figured out your smell. Me, I can't smell a thing with these ol' sinuses, but I'll go look under the house. *(Brief pause)* After lunch.

(Static comes from CB radio, then a voice.)

Jimmy

Break, Wrecker Man.

J.T.

Answer your daddy, Becky. You're closer to the CB.

Becky

(Speaks into CB mic.)

Go ahead, Fuse Box. This is the Princess.

Jimmy

Princess, tell your Paw that the FBI is on the way out there! They think there's a dead body out there!

Becky

(Adjusts knobs on the CB.)

Fuse Box, do you copy? You need a radio check! I thought you said the FBI was coming out here to check out a possible dead body!

Jimmy

Ten-four on the FBI and the dead body. I'm on my way out there! We're clear.

Becky

(Lays CB mic. on the table and turns to face J.T. and Ruby.)

Did you hear him? He says the FBI is coming out here to look for a dead body!

J.T.

Now, Becky, you know that's one of your daddy's jokes. Don't you remember that time he told you George Strait's bus wrecked and your MawMaw was feeding your favorite singer dinner?

Ruby

You sure weren't late that day, Becky! How long did it take you to get here? About 30 seconds?

Becky

Of course I remember that! I wouldn't have believed him if that hadn't been the day of the George Strait concert, you know. I don't think he's joking about this, though. It doesn't make sense.

J.T.

Becky, your daddy doesn't make sense. I told your mama that the first time she brought him home.

Becky

I don't care what you say, Paw. There's something fishy going on here.

(Agent Martin enters stage right, approaches door and knocks.)

J.T.

(doesn't move from chair, yells towards the screen door at stage right)

You're gonna have to come back later. I shut down for dinner. We'll open back up at 1:00.

Agent Martin

Mr. Walker, I'm Agent Amanda Martin, with the FBI. This is urgent.

J.T.

I don't care who you're with. I don't care if you're the assistant to the tooth fairy. I'm closed, I tell you.

Becky

See, I told you Daddy wasn't joking!

Agent Martin

Mr. Walker, you don't understand. We have reason to believe that there's a dead body in your car lot. Now open this door.

J.T.

Sure there is. Now who are you and how did Jimmy talk you into this? You may as well come on in. *(Motions for her to come in.)*

(Agent Martin enters the kitchen.)

Agent Martin

Mr. Walker, I have no idea who Jimmy is or what you're talking about. I am Agent Amanda Martin with the FBI. *(Hands J.T. her badge.)*

J.T.

(Examines the badge closely.)

Well, what do you know. Jimmy-- that's my son-in-law-- wasn't joking. Do you really believe that there's a dead body in my car lot?

Ruby

(Sits down at the table beside Becky.)

Have a chair, Ms. Martin. Have a chair.

Agent Martin

Thank you.

Ruby

(Pulling her chair closer to Agent Martin's.)

A dead body in the car lot! What will the neighbors think!

Becky

A dead body in the car lot! Maybe we'll be on the news! Live at five on TV3 - right here at Walker's Wrecker Service.

(Ruby begins removing curlers from her hair and placing them on the table.)

Ruby

James Thomas, get out of that chair and put on a clean shirt. And you never did find out what that smell is. (*pauses briefly*) That smell, it's not, it isn't. . . ? *(Almost gasping.)*

Becky

Is the dead dude stinking up the place?

Agent Martin

Well, it certainly could be the body. With this heat, a decomposing body certainly would smell by now.

Ruby

(Stands up and turns off her stove.)

Well, there goes dinner. *(picks up her curlers, places them in her apron and looks at Becky)* I'm going to comb out my hair.

J.T.

(Begins rubbing his hair, back and forth, and from side to side.)

Wait a minute, now. How did this supposed dead body get to my car lot? Did he rise up and walk?

Agent Martin

(seriously)

No, sir. Do you remember that car you pulled to your lot from Terry about three days ago?

J.T.

(nods his head)

Yeah, I got the car, but they took that man to the hospital, and I guess they took his poor wife to the morgue. Anyway, they aren't in my car lot. You know that I'm not in the habit of storing the owners with the cars.

Agent Martin

You're right about the driver and his wife. But it appears they picked up a hitchhiker in Louisiana, and he was seen after they crossed the state line. A waitress reported seeing him in the car at the Fernwood Truckstop. However, he hasn't been seen since the accident. It is believed that he may have been killed and put in the trunk. I don't have the authorization to open the trunk. We'd better contact the Copiah County Sheriff's Department.

J.T.

Of course. *(He looks at his watch.)* Let's see, it's 12:15, so he should be at the coffee shop by now. Becky, dial that number, and get the sheriff on the line.

Becky

(Dials the number and speaks into the phone.)

Miss Lucy? This is Becky Ramsey. Is the sheriff in there yet? PawPaw needs to speak to him. Oh, he's already started eating? Can you hold one second, Miss Lucy? *(moves the phone over slightly, and looks at J.T.)* He's already eating, PawPaw. He doesn't want to come to the phone.

J.T.

(Looks very angry, holds out his hand for the phone.)

Give me that phone, Becky. *(Becky hands him the phone.)* Lucy, this is J.T. Put Freddy on the phone, now. (*a brief pause)* I don't care if your hamburger gets cold, Freddy. Yes, this is an emergency! *(begins yelling)* Look, man, the FBI is out here. They think there's a dead man in my car lot. My wife has been spraying Lysol on my head all morning, and you're worried about a cold hamburger! Now, either you get out of that coffee shop and onto this hill, or I'll find another man to support in the next election. Do you understand me? *(J.T. hangs up the phone and smiles at Agent Martin.)* He's sending out a deputy, ma'am. *(J.T. turns around)* Sometime tomorrow, Becky, I need y'all to take down my re-elect Freddy signs. Copiah County needs a change, don't you think, Mama?

Becky

She's fixing her hair, PawPaw. I thought you said yesterday that Mr. Freddy was an excellent sheriff.

J.T.

(Hits the table, causing the papers to fly up.)

There's a dead body at a man's place of business, and the sheriff doesn't even care! He's gonna send Billy Lofton out here so his own hamburger doesn't get cold. Have you ever heard such?

Becky

(stares at J.T.)

He's sending Billy Lofton out here! We have the FBI and a possible dead body, and he's sending Deputy Dog out here! Barney on "The Andy Griffith Show" would be more useful, even without his bullet! Don't you remember when Billy refused to respond to the burglary in progress at the meat house?

J.T.

(looks at Agent Martin)

You see, Ms. Martin, some boys broke into Green's Meat House one night, and old lady Green called the sheriff's office, since the meat house isn't in the city limits. Billy lives near there, so he was told to respond. He refused to go. He said he was watching Scooby Doo, and wanted to see how it ended. Mrs. Green wound up shooting one of those boys, and she nearly killed the fool. They took him to the hospital at Jackson, and he lived.

Agent Martin

A deputy refused to respond to a call because he was watching cartoons! How did he keep his job?

J.T.

(*taps the side of his head with one finger)*

His bananas just ain't ready to be picked. They don't let him carry a gun anymore, though. Not since he tried to shoot the mayor's dog. He was at the mayor's farm, out in the country, and he saw the dog walk in the barn. So he shot at poor old Sam. He claimed he thought Sam was a man breaking into the barn. Luckily for old Sam, Billy missed.

Becky

Luckily for Billy, too. That whole family is crazy about that dog.

Ruby

(Re-enters room, having changed into a dress and fixed her hair)

Billy has a crush on our Becky. He thinks she's madly in love with him. Truth is, she's just mad at him.

Becky

He gets on my nerves. It's like I have one nerve left and he does this - (*Becky stands up, jumps up and down, and sits back down).* He makes me sick, sick, sick!

Ruby

(Sits back down at the table.)

Becky had to hide in the shop all afternoon one day last week. J.T. and I had gone down to Wal-Mart, and she was here working on some paperwork. She had walked out to the shop, and , well, you tell it Becky.

Becky

When I got out to the shop, Billy pulled up. He didn't see me, so I hid in the shop. I thought he'd leave when he figured out that no one was here, but I underestimated his stupidity. He sat in his truck, listened to the radio, and stared at the house for three hours and forty-three minutes! I could shoot him and stuff his body in a trunk with a smile on my face! In the Bible, they had the plague of the locusts. Around here, we have the plague of the Loftons.

J.T.

(Turns around and notices Ruby.)

Well, Ruby, it's not Sunday, is it? You sure do look awfully pretty.

(Ruby acts embarrassed.)

Becky

MawMaw just thinks she's going to be on TV.

Agent Martin

(looks at her watch)

I think we need to worry more about this investigation and less about the TV. Is this deputy really as bad as you say? Can't we have another deputy come out here? An incompetent deputy could ruin this investigation.

(The dog barks)

J.T.

(*stands up and looks out the door)*

It's too late. He's here. Anyway, all the deputies are on strike. Oh, Becky, your daddy's here. *(to Agent Martin)* He was a deputy, but he didn't go on strike. He got mad and quit. He's really hot-headed.

Becky

Daddy was one of the best deputies in the department, Agent Martin. He'll keep Billy from ruining your investigation. I hope so, anyway.

Agent Martin

I certainly hope so. I . . .

Billy

(Opens the door and comes in, with Jimmy behind him.)

Hey, Mr. J.T. What's this about a dead body? (*looks around the room and tips his hat to Agent Martin)* Oh, hello, ma'am. I don't see an FBI agent.

Ruby

You know, Billy, there is such a thing as a female FBI agent now. That's Agent Martin sitting right there.

Billy

(Ignores Ruby and Agent Martin.)

Hey, Becky. Do you want to go to the races this weekend?

Becky

No, I don't.

(Billy hangs his head and Ruby offers him some cookies and milk. Becky and Jimmy stand by the door.)

Becky

Daddy, you owe me fifty bucks. That was a sucker bet, Daddy.

Jimmy

(Pulls out his wallet, hands Becky money.)

Well, Becky, I didn't think anybody was stupid enough to ask out a girl for fifty-two straight weeks. Especially when she turned him down every single time.

Becky

It's pitiful, isn't it?

Agent Martin

(loudly)

Excuse me, but if everyone hasn't forgotten, we do have a murder investigation going on here.

J.T.

She is absolutely right. We need to get down in that car lot and look in that trunk.

Billy

(wipes milk off his mouth)

We can't, Mr. J.T.! My daddy and granddaddy are coming out here to see the body. Besides, Jimmy told all of y'all's buddies to come out here.

Becky

Daddy, I can't believe you did that! That's so unprofessional! Who all did you tell?

Jimmy

(sheepishly)

Well, I just told George. But George told Steve, and Steve told Jason. Then Jason told Paul and Don, and Paul told the rest of Copiah County, or tried to. Besides, I could hear your PawPaw over the phone, and I was sitting on the other side of the coffee shop under the air conditioner.

Billy

Miss Lucy told all her customers, and the sheriff told everybody that Mr. J.T. really was senile if he thought there was a dead body in his car lot.

J.T.

That sorry old goat! He doesn't even know what senile means. Shoot, he's the one that left the sheriff's car in gear and nearly ran over the preacher's wife! I swear, that man wakes up on a different planet every day, and not a one of them's earth!

Agent Martin

I simply cannot believe this. This investigation is turning into a disaster! Now, look, Deputy Lofton, *(points towards the door at stage right)* get down in that car lot - NOW!

Billy

But aren't we gonna wait on the guys?

(J.T. jumps up from his chair, grabs Billy by the ear, and drags him out the door. Jimmy, Becky, and Agent Martin follow.)

Becky

(as she walks out the door)

When will the TV people get here?

Ruby

(shakes her head)

What will the neighbors think? I'd better call Dorothy and tell her about the excitement.

(picks up the telephone)

(Lights down on stage left. Lights up on stage right.)

Scene 2

PLACE: J.T.'s car lot. Part of stage right should contain a diagonal fence about chest high on the actors to suggest the car lot. J.T., Agent Martin, and Billy stand behind the fence, and their actions are partially visible to the audience. Jimmy and Becky stop in front of it.

J.T.

Well, aren't y'all coming down here, too?

Jimmy

No, I think I'll stay up here. The boys from the coffee shop should be here soon.

J.T.

You mean you're scared you'll get sick. Remember how sick you were after that first wrecker call you went on? I can't believe my daughter married a man who can't smell something bad without getting sick. You comin', Becky?

Becky

No, sir. I'll stay on this side of the fence. If that man is in that trunk, I don't want Billy to run over me when he runs back to the house.

Billy

Don't worry, Becky. If that man is in that car, I'll protect you.

Becky

Billy, come here.

(Billy walks over to the fence. She reaches up and knocks on his forehead.)

Becky

Hello, is anybody home? If that man has been in the trunk of that car for three days, I really don't think he'll be much of a threat.

Billy

Well, you never know. I read in *National Inquirer* about a guy that was buried in some ice for fifty years. When they thawed him out, he was still alive.

Becky

Wow! That's fascinating! I didn't know you could read!

J.T.

Billy! Get over here to this car! Now!

(J.T., Agent Martin, and Billy stand on the other side of the fence, looking down at the car.)

J.T.

Boy, don't just stand there like a doofus! Open that trunk!

Billy

Please don't make me do that, Mr. J.T.! I don't want to see a dead body.

Agent Martin

Mr. Walker, do you have the keys to the car?

J.T.

(rubs his hair)

No. I don't know where the keys went. I didn't get them. We're gonna have to get a crow bar and break into it. Billy, run over there to my International wrecker and get a crowbar.

(Billy runs off stage.)

Jimmy

See, Becky. He is good for something, after all. He makes a pretty

good gopher. He can go for this and go for that.

Becky

Now if we could just get him housebroken, we might have a pretty good dog.

Jimmy

Now, Becky, that was mean! I know you don't like him, but he does have feelings.

(Billy returns with a crow bar over his shoulder.)

Billy

Here you go, Mr. J.T.

Jimmy

(to Becky)

Can you believe he got the right thing? I wasn't expecting that.

Becky

I just knew he was going to drag one of those chains over here. Maybe there's hope for him after all.

J.T.

Don't hand me that crowbar, Billy! I'm not going to break into that car! That's between you and the FBI agent.

Agent Martin

I think you're more qualified to break into cars than I am, Deputy.

(Sounds of Billy breaking into the trunk.)

(Sounds of a car pulling up in the driveway.)

George

(running down the aisle and onto stage right)

Wait! Wait! Don't open that trunk without me! Don't open that trunk without me!

(Billy stops moving and everybody looks at George.)

(George runs on stage, with his arms moving in time with his legs. Hands Becky a Styrofoam cup that she barely catches.)

Becky

(opens the lid and looks inside)

I cannot believe you brought your coffee. Oh, Mr. George, you'd better be glad this coffee didn't spill on me!

Agent Martin

Who is this? Another bumbling deputy?

J.T.

No ma'am. This is Jimmy's friend, George Barron. He owns the fruit stand on the highway. He's not a deputy, but he can make you a real good deal on watermelons.

Agent Martin

I don't want a watermelon! I want a dead body and I want to get out of this town!

George

Well, I wasn't going to give you a watermelon. My tomatoes are on sale, though. You look like you could use a good tomato sandwich.

Billy

A tomato sandwich does sound good. Does Miss Ruby have any Miracle Whip? I love Miracle Whip on my tomato sandwiches.

Agent Martin screams, jerks the crowbar out of Billy's hands, and hits the trunk of the car. The trunk pops open and Agent Martin, Billy, and J.T. look inside. Becky, Jimmy and George lean over the fence, trying to see.

Becky

What is it PawPaw? I can't see? Is it the man?

George

Y'all were supposed to wait! The rest of the boys aren't here yet!

Jimmy

What is it?

(Agent Martin and J.T. begin to laugh, and Billy looks confused.)

Billy

That ain't no dead man! It's shrimp!

Becky, Jimmy and George

Shrimp!

Becky

Do you mean a little man, Billy?

Billy

No, I don't mean a little man! What are you, stupid? I mean that there are two bags of shrimp in this trunk.

J.T.

It looks like about twenty pounds of ruined shrimp.

Becky

We're not going to be on the news! Nobody cares if you found twenty pounds of shrimp in the car! MawMaw is going to be so disappointed.

George

I missed my soap opera for this!?!

Jimmy

Since when do you watch soap operas?

George

Um, ah, the wife. Yeah, that 's it. My wife likes to watch them.

Agent Martin

Well, there goes my promotion. I'll be the laughingstock of the Bureau now.

Billy

Well, you can always move to Copiah County and be a deputy.

Agent Martin

Not on your life!

Ruby

(from stage left.)

J.T.! What did you find?

George

(Pouting)

Well, it ain't a dead body!

J.T.

(yells back)

It was about twenty pounds of shrimp, Mama!

Ruby

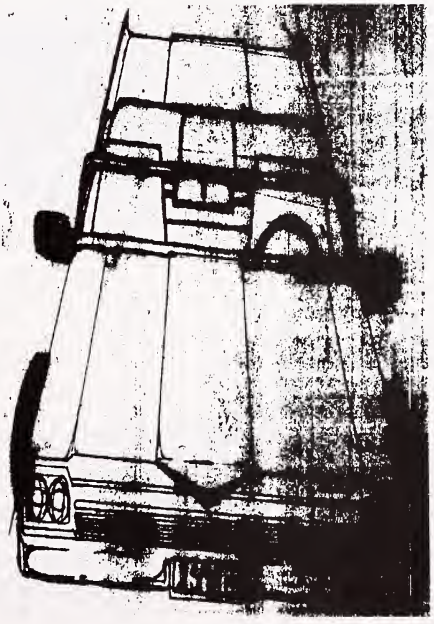
Oh, no! Now we won't get to be on TV! I guess I've got to change clothes again! J.T., you've got a call! A chicken truck wrecked on I-55 South just past the Gallman exit! Becky, come help me clean out the refrigerator! It's frozen chicken!

(J.T., Jimmy, George, and Billy run off stage. Agent Martin walks slowly away. Becky faces the audience.)

Becky

And that's another day in the life of the wrecker man. Thank y'all for coming. Oh, and if you wreck your car, or if you need any chicken or ice cream for that matter, you know who to call. *(turns and begins to walk of stage, then pauses)* I knew there was something fishy going on around here. *(walks off stage)*

First Place, MCCCWA 1996



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Notes